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POWER COUPLE

A CHAT WITH DEVELOPMENT LEGEND AWARD WINNERS BRENDA AND JOHN ROMERO

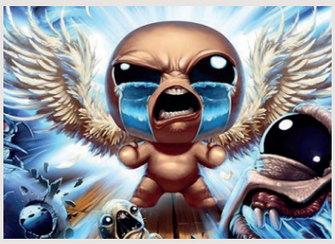
REBELLION ■ BEST OF BRITISH ■ CLIMAX STUDIOS

AT A GLANCE

JULY 14TH

BASTILLE DAY

La Fête nationale commemorating the Storming of the Bastille



JULY 14TH

THE BINDING OF ISAAC

Afterbirth+ finally comes to Switch

JULY 21ST

SPLATOON 2

We have an INKling that this will be a very good game... *tumbleweeds*

AUGUST 4TH

INTERNATIONAL BEER DAY

Ah, beer. The cause of and the soloution to all of life's problems

DIARY DATES

DEVELOP QUIZ 2017

July 11th, Komedia, Brighton

www.nbmevents.uk/developawards/quiz

JULY

Develop:Brighton
July 11th-13th, Hilton Brighton Metropole, Brighton
www.developconference.com

Gamerbake Brighton: My Favourite Game
July 11th, 68 Middle Street, Brighton
http://bit.ly/2skZHqn

Play@Develop 2017
July 12th, Soosh Beach Bar, Brighton
http://bit.ly/2q1w5gD

Gamesindustry.biz Summer Party
July 12th, Patterns, Brighton
http://bit.ly/2taW0jR

Develop Game Jam
July 12th-13th, Hilton Brighton Metropole, Brighton
www.developconference.com/develop-game-jam

SpecialEffect OneSpecial Day launch party
July 13th, Oh So Social, Brighton
http://bit.ly/2t8QuRg

EVENT SPOTLIGHT

DEVELOP AWARDS 2017
Where: Hilton Brighton Metropole, Brighton
When: July 12th
What: The biggest awards night in the game development industry with new categories for 2017
www.nbmevents.uk/developawards

COMING SOON

DEVELOP #185

THE STORYTELLING ISSUE

Video games can succeed and fail on the quality of their narrative design, so we dedicate this issue to interviews with and advice from the industry's best storytellers

DEVELOP #186

THE LOCALISATION AND QA ISSUE

They are two of the biggest parts of the games industry but so often are they overlooked. This issue we look at the disciplines and talk to the leaders in the fields

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develop is published 11 times a year by NewBay Media Europe Ltd, The Emerson Building, 4th Floor, 4-8 Emerson Street, London SE1 9DU

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Printed by Pensord Press Ltd, NP12 2YA
Print ISSN 1365-7240

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This month we're shining a light on the very greatest developers we could find among our fair green isles. Join us in celebrating the long legacy of Britain's games history, and its bright future as a global leader

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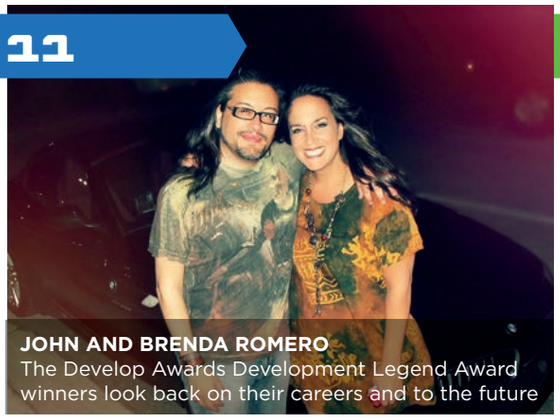

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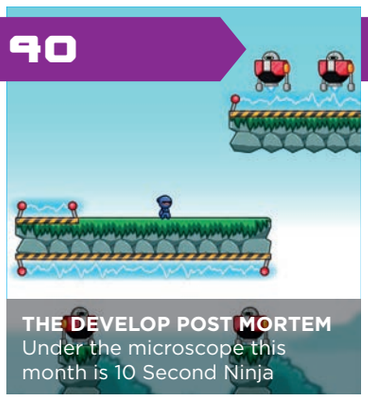

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Editorial

The Develop:Brighton conference kicks off this month and this issue of the magazine will be freely available to all attendees. That means that the Develop Awards will also be taking place soon – my first as editor – and I can't wait to see you all there.

Develop:Brighton holds a special place in my heart. It was my first press event, back when I was just starting out in 2007.

At the conference I conducted my first industry interview. It was with Rhianna Pratchett, who just last month I handed the Creative Impact award at the Women in Games Awards.

I think this is a great example of how tightly knit the development community is.

> **Develop:Brighton holds a special place in my heart. It was my first press event, back when I was just starting out**

Meet someone at a show and you'll consistently see them pop up at various places throughout your career. A casual acquaintance can very easily become a valued colleague, whether by serendipity or by design.

Events like Develop:Brighton facilitate this brilliantly and I'm very much looking forward to making and strengthening connections at the show.

To celebrate the congregation of the UK games industry in Brighton, we've put together a Best of British directory this issue. A massive list of over 25 games studios which demonstrate the great strength of the region.

We also have a fantastic interview with Development Legend award winners Brenda and John Romero.

Don't miss it!

Jem Alexander
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DLC-QUELS

Expansions for narrative games are becoming too big for their boots. **Jem Alexander** thinks these smaller triple-A experiences are a great way to remove financial pressure from developers and players alike

Sony's rather bizarre E3 press conference opened with a strong trailer for *Uncharted: The Lost Legacy*, which eclipsed everything else in the showcase that wasn't *God of War* shaped. This despite the fact that it's a piece of downloadable content for *Uncharted 4*.

But Naughty Dog has already taught us with *The Last of Us: Left Behind* that DLC can actually work better when it's not tied to a game disc. Standalone side-stories for the best narrative games are becoming more common and, from a development perspective, it makes absolute perfect sense for all involved.

Left Behind is a prequel to *The Last of Us* and as such it works great as a cheap entry point to the universe for those unwilling to pay £40 for a game they're not sure about. It makes less sense for *The Last of Us*, perhaps, since it's such a fantastic game that everyone should own it, but the point was still well made by Naughty Dog.

The switch in character focus and the shorter play time made this a tighter, more concise game than the original. When your DLC is arguably (and I will argue the point!) a better game than its progenitor, you've got to wonder whether spending so much time and money on giant triple-A epics is always worth it.

Uncharted: The Lost Legacy looks like it'll be doing something very similar. Whether it will match *Uncharted 4*'s full glory remains to be seen, but the change in focus and the opportunity for players to explore a separate part of the universe is incredibly compelling for fans. As well as for people who haven't yet tried the *Uncharted* franchise and who might appreciate a more affordable entry point to the series that isn't already a console generation old.

Likewise, Bethesda announced during its press conference that a *Dishonored* side-story will be released as standalone DLC. *Dishonored: Death of the Outsider* again gives players a new character to play and therefore a new perspective on the story of the series. A shorter experience which is cheaper to make for the developer, less expensive for the player and less of a time commitment for all involved. Which is the perfect storm for something rarely witnessed in triple-A development: experimentation.

> **When your DLC is a better game than its progenitor, you've got to wonder...**

The ability to take a triple-A franchise and truly explore it by switching up mechanics, characters, timelines and more is something that comes with a huge risk when you're talking about building another £20m+ epic. Much more palatable for publishers and developers to spend a fraction of that on a tighter experience that can satisfy fans and keep them sated until the next big release.

But maybe you don't even need a next big release? With *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*, Ninja Theory is offering a triple-A experience that lasts "half as long" as a big budget game, but for half the price. A fantastic idea that players appear to have embraced wholeheartedly. Because let's be honest, not everyone has the time nowadays to play your 20+ hour magnum opus.

This feels like the perfect companion to episodic games, like *Life is Strange* and the many Telltale series, which are also a very compelling proposition for cash and time starved gamers. I'd love to see this trend of experimental, tighter, short experiences that have full triple-A quality continue to grow. Let's build on the universes fans have fallen in love with and find surprising ways to explore their favourite characters and worlds. While saving a few quid in the process. And a lot of precious time. ■

IT'S GETTING DIRTY

It has been a period of rejuvenation for Codemasters over the last five years. Now firmly back in the driving seat, **Sean Cleaver** reminds us all how the studio got back to where they deserve to be – pole position

Frequent readers of this publication will know that I'm a fan of racing games, and might see this as an excuse to get a picture of my cool in-game car in here (look how cool it is!), but what I'm really writing about is the very welcome reclaiming of the throne for one of Britain's oldest and best studios – Codemasters.

I've had the good fortune to preview and review many racing games over the years. Two of those games were *F1 2014* and *GRID Autosport*. It has to be said that this was not a good time for the developer. *GRID 2* was too arcadey for many. There were changes in the rules of Formula 1 that were hard to replicate. A new generation of consoles were coming and the EGO engine was aging. All of this contributed to a rather tough time for the Midlands studio.

It could all have ended very differently given that this was at a time where British studios were struggling and closing. But then something happened. Codemasters looked to themselves for answers.

DiRT Rally was born out of a desire to completely and utterly focus on the joys of rally driving. Often cited as the *Dark Souls* of racing games, *DiRT Rally* tested us, the people that had got used to spinning around in circles for points, to 'git gud'. Meticulously planned stages based on the real life locations from the motorsport posed challenges for us to overcome and perfect. It also fulfilled the lust that every racing game fan has to create their fantasy garage with some of the coolest cars ever produced. It was a veritable feast of crashy crashy broom brooms.

> **DiRT Rally was a veritable feast of crashy crashy broom brooms**

It was very hard, but so is rally. Physics, handling, graphics, courses – Codemasters got it so very, very right.

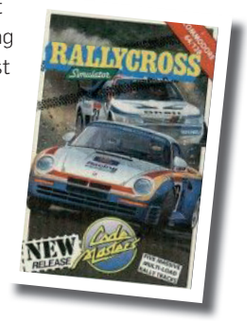
Following Early Access and the positive reception, console and VR adaptions came, which gave the studio the ability to grow once again. After acquiring Evolution Studios following Sony shuttering the *DriveClub* developer in 2016, the race was on to get everyone, simulation and arcade fans alike, to return to the dirt.

And here we are. *DiRT 4* is out and it is a cracking game, which has been well received by everyone. Of course, there are things I'd have loved to have seen, like more locations but the Your Stage system of procedurally generating custom tracks is excellent.

It's not just rally. *F1 2017* looks to be heading back to the heights it reached in *F1 2013*, with many classic cars coming to the new game.

Micro Machines World Tour will also have been released by the time you read this. From those classic curved 16-bit Mega Drive cartridges with controller ports to our digital age, it's amazing how the series has come back to modern consoles and is as good as ever.

It's incredible to think that a studio I first saw back when I was five, with its distinct cassette tape packaging is still here. Still creating games and surviving the adversity the games industry so often throws around. All of this because they took the time to step back and remember what it was that they loved about making the racing games in the first place, before deciding to get dirty. Congratulations Codemasters, it's good to have you here. ■



GAINING THE EDGE

Edge Case Games CEO, **James Brooksby**, talks about the impact of Brexit and poor air conditioning

The development community is living in exciting times – as always. Highly capable consoles have been released, Brexit is looming and sporadic heatwaves have us Brits glowing red and looking for decent air conditioning.

At Edge Case Games here in Guildford, we have nurtured our fledgling game *Fractured Space* through the challenges of Early Access on Steam and are in the ongoing stage of adding features and polishing everything.

On the development side, there are three key areas we draw from when deciding what to do – our community's opinions and feedback, our own opinions, experience and capabilities, and the data we pore over.

On the business side though, things are a bit murkier and some of the challenges are difficult to quantify.

It's unclear how Brexit will affect our industry, but there are some specific areas of concern. Our playerbase is global, with less than ten per cent in the UK. Our staff are also from a variety of different countries. We are not a big team, but we need highly skilled personnel to both continually develop and expand our game and get it out to our players. It's unclear on how Brexit will impact our current team of 35 and what it will do to our ability to recruit from outside the UK in the future. Work visas may be available, but it does create another hurdle for us to negotiate.

It's useful being in a gaming hub, but if there is a bit of a brain drain looming it could be a major problem for all of us as there will be a smaller pool of talent to draw from.

I expect the same issue to impact some of our partners. We are gearing up to launch in other languages later this year, and we will need ongoing third party localisation services. Obviously, the capability of local firms to provide these could also be affected. There are a number of key European territories we are looking to move into, Germany in particular, and we have to look at how we staff up for these moves.

> **The British dev scene has never had it so good. There are very few barriers**

We are proud of our community support, but I can see this quality being tricky to maintain. It was always going to be a challenge, but this just makes it tougher. Through all that murkiness though, there are glimmers of hope.

In some ways, the British dev scene has never had it so good. Pretty much anyone who wants to make games can do it – there are very few barriers to entry. You can develop at a competitive high quality now, with a variety of free or cheap tools. Getting your game out there is easier than ever on mobile or PC – and not that much more complex on console. Also, the exchange rate right now means that if you are looking to work for (or with) partners around the world, British developers look keenly priced. Finally, the investment scene is really heating up, with more investors coming around to understanding that video games are not the out-and-out risk they once were.

Some challenges remain insurmountable though – where can you find a good portable aircon? ■

LOOKING TO VR'S PAST FOR TINY TRAX'S FUTURE

FuturLab sets out to develop a virtual reality game that its motion-sensitive staff can actually play. Development director **Kirsty Rigden** talks about the problem of sickness and explains how they beat it

Everyone knows that the inner ear is home to the smallest bone in the human body, right? You might even have scored points in a pub quiz by naming it as the stapes/stirrup.

But did you know that the inner ear also contains the smallest muscle too? Put those two pieces together with the hammer, anvil and the vestibule and throw in about 15,000 hair cells and you have an extremely complex and sensitive organ. As well as five points in the quiz.

Sometimes the ear can be a little over-sensitive, approximately 1/3 of the population are highly susceptible to motion sickness. This can occur when the images that your eyes are seeing don't match the motion that your inner ears are experiencing.

Within the FuturLab team, we have a higher percentage of those who suffer from motion sickness than those who don't. While I have a stomach made of rock, after an incident on the spinning teacups at Legoland, it's fair to say that several team members most definitely don't!

So naturally we decided to make a VR game. Thankfully it turned out we couldn't have been better equipped for the job, as those ears forced us to move in an unexpected direction.

It's worth pausing to consider just how cutting edge the VR games development environment is in 2017. There are hundreds of studios out there, large and small, who are only just discovering the possibilities of VR, pushing its limits and producing some quite amazing work.

All of which is incredible considering that VR games first took a public bow in seaside arcades way back in the 1990s. I remember strapping myself into one of the first incarnations at London's ExCel centre. It was incredibly heavy on my 12 year old

head (pictured), I can remember trying to duck behind large pixellated blocks to avoid objects hurtling towards me.

And then, after a moment in the spotlight, it was almost as if VR completely disappeared for the best part of two decades. During that time we've seen whole entertainment formats come and go.

We're at the point now where technology has caught up with what was always a compelling concept – being able to lose yourself for fun in an immersive virtual world.

The great thing about being in the early stages of new a video game platform (albeit second time around) is the blank canvas it offers in terms of gameplay experience.

However, there are some unique considerations when it comes to VR in terms of ensuring player comfort – something our in-house sensitivities to motion made us only too conscious of.

In fact, the game we're about to release, *Tiny Trax*, is very different from what we set out to make.

The project was originally going to be a drone racer, but once we began researching the other racing VR games out there we quickly came to the realisation that it was probably a little too vertigo-inducing. Personally I loved the feeling of my stomach rising and falling as if I were on a rollercoaster. I do believe that some enterprising developer will create the bucking bronco of VR games, where the objective is to last as long as possible without being ill. They will be incredibly commercially successful and then lose everything overnight in the subsequent lawsuit...

> **Some enterprising developer will create the bucking bronco of VR games**

Luckily, our game designer, Dave Gabriel, had a moment of clarity one day in the office kitchen – what if we turned the VR concept on its head by keeping the player static in a virtual world, while they control the action going on around them?

And so, *Tiny Trax* was born. The player looks on, Godlike, on a fantastical world, controlling a miniature car in races that snake around their body, jump overhead and drift around bends on a virtual track.

Creatively, putting aside the complex physics that a drone racer would have entailed allowed us to focus on track design, beautiful world design and gameplay. We also really wanted to create a VR game that could be played competitively.

I think this kind of 'alternative' approach to VR games is something we'll see a lot more of as the genre matures towards the mass market, where the need for players to be able to 'pick and up and play' is important. We can't wait. ■

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POWER COUPLE

Brenda and John Romero have both been making games a lot longer than they've been married, with each of them planting their individual flags in the industry over the years. **Jem Alexander** talks to the pair of Development Legends ahead of their win at the Develop Awards

Sometimes video game legends are like buses. Spend enough time waiting around for one, and two might show up at once. That's how it feels to be handing Development Legend awards to both John and Brenda Romero at the Develop Awards this month. Individually, they've each contributed hugely to the games industry, and they're pushing forward to continue their individual legacies together with their studio Romero Games. ▸

The genesis of Romero Games is full of love. The couple's love for each other, sure, but also a love of Ireland and, in particular, Galway. "Brenda was awarded a Fulbright Specialist grant to study the Irish game ecosystem," John says. "We spent three months in Ireland and were very impressed, so we decided to sell everything and move to Galway."

The Romeros' ability to up sticks and move on a whim is thanks to rapid improvements in global connectivity. "The industry is now at a place where you can live pretty much anywhere and do what we do," says Brenda. "Digital distribution, distributed teams (although ours is all local), and internet is all we need. Ireland is also incredibly tech aware and tech ready. We have better internet here than we had in Silicon Valley, believe it or not, and there is an incredibly availability of both programmers and artists."

Galway is delightfully picturesque, certainly, but it's not the bustling city centre of Dublin, which now houses the European headquarters of Amazon, Dropbox and Riot Games. So why Galway? "Galway is a really special place," says Brenda. "It's consistently on the top ten lists of the world's friendliest cities. It is appropriately funky for game developers, has a great quality of life and a vibrant community where people know one another. It feels like home."

> **I absolutely love that Nintendo is back. They are the greatest game company in our industry**
> *John Romero*

"We did some research," adds John. "And we found Galway to be a huge winner in terms of culture, size, and charm. The dev community here is pretty close. The people are honest, genuine and modest."

Romero Games is paving the way for the Galway games industry, staffing themselves up for upcoming projects and cementing their position in the city. "We currently have several games in development which are of varying dev lengths," John says through tight lips. "None are at a point that we can talk about them publicly."

"We have been staffing up," adds Brenda. "We're the biggest game developer in Galway presently."

REPRESENTATIVE

Diversity and representation in games is something that both Brenda and John are keen to see broaden. "Diversity in games is improving every year," says John. "We can improve by continuing the trend of more female leads, more races and orientations, and different subject matter."

"There are so, so many stories to be told in games," Brenda adds. "One of my favorite games from last year was *1979 Revolution: Black Friday*. That's a story I couldn't tell.

"I recently talked with Nasir Gebelli about *1979 Revolution*. He's the sole coder of *Final Fantasy I*, *II* and *III* as well as *Secret of Mana* and many others. Nasir left during the Iranian revolution to go to college. As we get more voices into games from a broad diversity of backgrounds, I believe we will see more of that."

Diversity is just one way in which the industry has improved and grown over the years. Looking back, what are their most impactful examples of this?

"Many of the biggest games in the industry took place on a single screen," says John. "They were also single player, like *Lode Runner*, *Hard Hat Mack*, *Archon*, and *Wizardry*.

"What's sad to have lost are some of our pioneers such as Dani Berry, Jim Nitchals, Bob Bishop, and Silas Warner before they were properly biographed."

"Like John said, we have lost many of our pioneers," says Brenda. "Of all those, I feel Dani Berry's loss the most. Her work was years ahead. It's a pity she didn't live to share the wealth of her knowledge or to see that games had finally achieved what she dreamt.

"My favourite example of change? That's easy. It was 1993. It was a great year for games. Amazing. But it was

not a great year for game developers who were not at Cyan or id Software. We were still working on the *Wizardry* series which still pushed things in terms of design and storytelling, but which lagged in technology. I remember seeing *Myst* and *Doom* and thinking that for the first time we were behind, and not just behind, we were merely looking at vapor trails of what had passed."

VAPOR TRAILS

For many developers the bright lights of E3 can give them similar feelings to those experienced by Brenda back in 1993. With the entire industry jostling for the limelight, sometimes smaller, less bombastic games can get lost.

"After the last few years, I've been playing close attention to E3, but in a really weird way," says Brenda. "I hear and pay attention to the massive announcements from the massive publishers about the massive games, and I will enjoy them and play them. But what I am most eager to see are the games on the periphery. The indie stuff that's going to get a mention here or there. Those are the games that are going to go up against Goliath for GOTY. Those are the games that I have really enjoyed."

> **There are so, so many stories to be told in games. As we get more voices into games I believe we will see more**
> *Brenda Romero*

John, meanwhile, is just glad to see a mainstay of the industry back on its feet after a rough few years.

"I absolutely love that Nintendo is back," he says. "They are the greatest game company in our industry, given the amount of legendary IP, incredibly designed games, and the ability to define their own hardware platforms. They are the games industry equivalent of Apple Computer.

LEGENDARY

Between the two of them the Romeros have touched some huge names in gaming, such as *Doom*, *Wolfenstein*, *Wizardry* and *Jagged Alliance*, and they've inspired countless others. This month they both have keynotes at the Develop:Brighton conference (at which you may be reading this very magazine!) before attending the Develop Awards and receiving the Development Legend award.

"My talk is titled 'Stay'," says Brenda. "A couple years ago I was helping a new college grad look for jobs and it occurred to me that it was something I'd never need to do for myself again. I had somehow made it from metaphorical cradle to eventual grave in the game industry, and it was something I was profoundly grateful for. I've often been asked how I managed to do it, how I have stayed, how I have weathered the storms. That's what this talk is about. I guess more than anything, it's a love letter.

"It's an incredible honor to keynote Develop Brighton! It's a conference that I have wanted to go to for so long, and I certainly didn't expect to be going as a keynote."

Despite being crowned a Development Legend, John is keen for people to know that, especially nowadays, everyone is capable of reaching the same status in the industry as he has. "My talk is titled A Life In Games," he says. "I talk about where I started out and go over some of the bigger games in my ludography. I like starting out a show with a talk that people can relate to, that lets people see that they can do the same things that I did."

"We are both honored to be winning the Development Legend award," says John. "And we will have a great time talking to the attendees. Making games every day is such a great way to live, and we love to share that joy and experience with others."

"It's just amazing, really," adds Brenda. "Legend is a big, big word. I failed to die and I failed to change careers. I kept making games. I am overwhelmingly grateful. The game industry is my home and my family." ■

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Almost two and a half decades since setting up the studio, Rebellion remains fiercely independent and continues to grow on the back of its many successes. **Jem Alexander** speaks to CEO Jason Kingsley about making great games with no external shareholders

Rebellion is one of Britain's great success stories. The Oxford-based studio has survived 24 years as an independent developer, much of that before being indie was considered cool. During that time, brothers Chris and Jason Kingsley have developed an impressive array of games, many of which belong to beloved established pop-culture franchises.

"Chris and I set Rebellion up not because we wanted to run a business, but because we wanted to make computer games," says CEO Jason Kingsley. "We needed a bit of infrastructure to make games, so it was almost that we had to have a company in order to make our games. We're privately owned, we don't have any venture capitalists. It's just us that are ultimately to blame if something goes wrong.

"We started out doing workfor hire 20 years ago. Work for hire is good and bad; it's good because its relatively low risk, but it's bad because if you have a big hit then someone else makes the money. So it's a good place to learn how to do something risky and learn how to do it well, and then you can do it for yourself.

"I don't know if we're allowed to call ourselves an indie dev, but we're about as indie as you can get, we're a family owned company. Nobody owns us."

When asked about the company's biggest achievements, Kingsley's answer is simple. "The obvious greatest achievement is that we're still going. Anyone that runs a business can tell you that just to be in business for three years is an achievement. Most companies will fail within three years. Just to be still here, doing what we love and now expanding into new areas like film, TV book publishing, comic books... I'm very happy that we're still alive and doing better than ever before."

Over the years the company has grown, taking many of the traditional publisher responsibilities in-house. "We've got different infrastructure around us now," Kingsley says. "When we were doing work for hire we would finish a game and hand it over to a publisher. They would do marketing, PR and, if we were lucky, we would get the odd interview concerning the game. Now we have great people interally helping us market and promote our products.

"We have a marketing department, a customer support department and we have a PR department involved in making marketing materials. All of these things used to be handled by other people on other projects, but now we're doing things ourselves we need to have the infrastructure ourselves. And its good, its nice. We have more control over it, we can make sure the quality stays high and it's been good so far."

QA OR NOT QA

Part of that evolution includes developing its in-house QA department, something that Kingsley sees as vitally important when it comes to ensuring the quality of Rebellion's games.

"We've always had developer QAs," he says. "We probably had four who just checked and ordered things, but now we've got ten people in QA, if not more, and we outsource so that when we need 30 people to simultaneously play a game we can bring them in.

"We have much more QA than we had before. It's a very important part of making a game, and a QA department is an integral part of the team that makes sure what we're making is playable. At the end of the day, what I always say to the QA team is: You are our consumers' conscience. It's your job to tell us if we're wrong. You're our last line of defence, if it gets past you the consumers are going to

be exposed to whatever we've done, so for goodness sake tell us if we've got it wrong.

"That's really important. I think everyone in the development team knows and appreciates the value of QA. A lot of time it is seen as annoying, but they are a hugely important component. I think there are a lot of games that have come out more recently and in the past where it's quite clear they cut corners with QA, and maybe were released a few months too soon. While that might improve quarterly returns, I think in the long run it damages the game itself and the brand, because the company is releasing broken games. And broadly speaking I think it damages the games industry because the consumers won't trust us any more.

They'll think 'oh, it will probably be broken because all the other games are broken' and in some cases people will be right, but when it comes to our games, I'm hoping people will go 'oh, this is nice, this one works!'".

GOOD ENOUGH ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH

Making quality games is why the Kingsley brothers founded Rebellion in the first place, so it's no surprise that almost 25 years later it's still at the forefront of Jason's mind.

"I think our corporate culture is to make good games," he says. "And one of the filters we have for this is: 'Is it very good or better?'. If it's not very good we have to have an extremely good reason for releasing it to the public. Like artwork and screenshots; if we need ten good screenshots, we'll generate 50 screenshots and go 'well, that's okay but it's not very good' and 'that's good, but it's not *very* good'.

"By the end we'll hopefully have ten very good screenshots. But you see, good enough isn't good enough. If it's rushed, we won't just chuck something out. I dont think thats right.

> **A QA department is an integral part of the team that makes sure what we're making is playable**
> *Jason Kingsley*

We're in the fantastic position that we don't have shareholders and we don't have quarterly budgets to hit or any of that sort of stuff. We don't have corporate baggage and we don't have people owning our company. So if we look at a game and think 'this game isn't ready, we need to spend another six months working on it', then we will give it another six months. If a game genuinely needs more time than we think, that's the right way to look at it."

Rebellion goes one step further with its devotion to independence and doesn't use any of the industry's rapidly growing middleware offerings. Not through conscious choice, necessarily, but more through habit. "When we started we never had middleware, you had to do everything yourself," Kingsley says. "So when making games we'd grown up on that tradition, using our own engines by our own team. We've usually done all our work on that engine and usually it give us a strength over studios that don't.

"Middleware is owned by other people. I mean, Unreal and Unity, I love them and the people that use them. They're colleagues and I know them all and they do a superb job. Perhaps if we were starting again, we would probably use middleware. It would be an easier and cheaper solution than just doing it ourselves. But with your own engine you've got the history of building it and along with that the strategic advantage that nobody can have your technology. Nobody can shut it down because they don't have enough money.

"Unity has come in and taken over at the lower end of the middleware market and that has challenged Unreal. They're partially owned by Tencent now. You could imagine a situation where Tencent went 'no, we're keeping this for ourselves'. I don't think it's likely, but in business you've always got to think about these black swan events. So if middleware disappeared, nothing would happen. We would keep on making games. Empires fall. I bet nobody thought Rome would ever end during the height of the Roman Empire. Broadly speaking, in business, if you rely on third parties you are taking a risk. We've always wanted to be majorly independent, our whole ethos is to be independent, and we're lucky enough to have a very strong team of coders who work and build on that engine."

Not only is Jason proud to be independent, but he's also proud of being part of the UK games industry. There's troubling times ahead, with the uncertainty of Brexit looming, but he's confident in the resilience of British studios. "I think there's a great range of game developers, really technically minded ones, creatively able, possibly underfunded, scrabbling around to get it together," he says. "There is a lot of potential. I think British developers are the best in the world, and can continue to be the best in the world going forwards." ■

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LIFE WILL BE STRANGE

With a suite of in-house storytelling tools, Deck Nine Games is working on a prequel to one of its favourite titles. **Jem Alexander** speaks to co-game director Chris Floyd about what it's like to create new ripples in the Life is Strange universe

Every now and then a games studio will cocoon itself away from the world, rebuilding itself from the ground up with a fresh vision and a new focus. This is exactly what Deck Nine Games (nee Idol Minds) has done for the past three years. This has resulted in a new project on a franchise of which many of the studio's employees are fans. Deck Nine Games is developing the *Life is Strange* prequel, announced at E3.

Called *Life is Strange: Before the Storm*, the prequel will be a three-part side-story that will exist canonically aside *Life is Strange*'s upcoming sequel. For Deck Nine it's the ultimate passion project and the perfect way to cut its teeth as a new studio with a new name.

"We spent the last three years turning our focus towards cinematic narrative adventure games," says co-game director Chris Floyd. "We've built up a team of storytellers. We went to the film world and the TV world, but also video games to bring together cinematic artists, environment artists, level designers and of course writers who wanted to tell stories.

"We put that team together but at the same time we were also developing a toolset we have called Storyforge. That's made to get all the technical barriers out of the way for these creative people and let them make these kinds of games, write creative stories and create these kinds of great cinematic sequences."

STORYFORGE

Storyforge is what ultimately landed Deck Nine the *Life is Strange* gig in the first place. The tool demonstrated to Square Enix a devotion to and skill for storytelling which impressed them enough to hand over the keys to the *Life is Strange* kingdom.

"It's a really unique tool and there really aren't any tools out there like it," Floyd says. "We've shown it to professionals who've made these kinds of games before and they were blown away. That includes the folks at Square when we sat down and showed it to them.

> **Storyforge is a really unique tool and there really aren't any tools out there like it**
> *Chris Floyd, co-game director*

"Storyforge really has two main parts. One is called Playwright, and this is essentially our screenwriting tool. It's like writing a standard movie screenplay and it looks a lot like that. Except our writers can also inject in the gameplay, the logic, the choice points and the branches, and we can actually then view the script like it's a big flowchart.

"We can see how much it branches out here and see that maybe we have too few choices there, so we can flesh that out and see how the story expands and comes back together. Then we generate our gameplay and the open freeroam spaces. What are all the objects we can look at and what is Chloe going to say when she looks at them? That's all in a script."

Playwright is just part of the full Storyforge experience, though.

"We can pull the script out of Playwright and bring in our other tool which is called Storyteller," Floyd explains. "This is our cinematic development engine, so that's where we lay out that script and it becomes a giant timeline with all these sequences in it. You'll bring in a character and apply an animation to it at the right time and say how long it will play for.

"Then we'll do a facial performance, where we will literally have sliders and say 'hey, let's turn up the sadness here' or 'let's turn down the surprise' and that's where we get our nuanced facial performances. It also does all of our lipsync, which basically comes right from the VO files."

For the time being, Storyforge is exclusively being used by Deck Nine, but there are internal discussions to release it as middleware. There's no indication on timeframe (or even if it will definitely happen), as the studio is focusing on using it to make sure they can make the best games they can.

FANSERVICE

As fans of the original game, being handed the reins on a canonical prequel is a huge project for the studio, though taking on such a beloved franchise comes with its own problems. "We sat down to talk about a variety of projects with Square, and we showed them our tools," says Floyd. "But then they came to us and asked if we wanted to make the next *Life is Strange*, and we were like... We just wanted to play the game! We honestly didn't think we'd be making the next one.

"So this was huge for us and we were very excited, but it's a lot of pressure. *Life is Strange* was a great game and to be picking it up now... I'll be very honest to you it's a lot of pressure but it's a privilege." ■

Sumo Digital, Nottingham, Studio Director – Karl Hilton

Based in the Castle Marina area of the city and with Nottingham castle dominating the skyline, the Sumo Nottingham studio is a state-of-the-art space dedicated to supporting the highest calibre of game development's most creative people.

The studio already has two teams hard at work on unannounced, exciting projects. Following an ethos of highly targeted recruitment to ensure a mixture of industry veterans, experienced development staff and graduates to create dynamic, energetic and knowledgeable teams.

Building and supporting teams that are comprehensive in their capabilities for delivering on the very high standards expected by today's triple-A videogames market is a key driver for future success for Sumo Digital in Nottingham.

The studio is excited about the future and to attract the best game development talent from all over the world.

Sumo Videogames, Pune, India – Studio Director, Alexis Madinier

Sumo India is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year. In the past decade we've built a core, highly skilled team that works as an integral part of Sumo. Going forward the India studio will continue to evolve and play a key role in the creativity that Sumo is known for.

SUMO DIGITAL

Jem Alexander gets an inside look at Sumo Digital and asks COO, Paul Porter, how the multi studio developer balances work for hire with creating its own IPs

Could you please give an overview of Sumo's history?

Sumo was started in 2003, following the closure of Infogrames in Sheffield, by myself, Carl Cavers, Darren Mills and James North-Hearn. We'd all worked together from Gremlin days so with some great support in place we took the opportunity to start a new development studio.

What is Sumo's corporate culture like? How important is it to the company?

Sumo is a people-orientated business. We couldn't do what we do without an incredible group of talented people. Right from day one, our priority was to build an open and creative environment where people could thrive; for us it's essential that people here enjoy their work, feel a great sense of achievement and are proud to be part of the company.

What are your opinions on work for hire vs creating new IPs internally?

Sumo's approach to all projects is the same, whether for established IP or the creation of new IP. While for established IP there are some parameters to work within there's also an incredible level of creativity and technology. It's easy to underestimate the amount of work that goes into working with someone else's treasured IP. When it's handled well it's seamless and just feels 'right', that in itself is something we strive for

How was the reception of *Snake Pass* and how has that affected your plans for the future?

Seeing the success and reception to the unique mechanic in *Snake Pass* has been really heartwarming. It hasn't changed Sumo's plans. The internal gamejams will hopefully produce more, interesting titles for us

to self-publish. But we're laser-focused on continuing to do what we do well and that's big budget, large scale, high quality triple-A titles based on established IPs.

What are your thoughts on the British games industry, our role on the global stage and how Sumo fits into that?

For me, the UK has always punched above its weight with incredible creativity and innovation in many fields. I don't know about being a 'nation of shopkeepers' but I do believe we're a 'nation of creators'. That's as true today as it was when the first 8-bit computers were created. There's a thriving development community across the nation, working on a huge array of titles and ideas, from modders to triple-A studios like Sumo. On the global stage our role is simply to deliver brilliant and fun gaming experiences and at Sumo that's our number one priority.

We've built an established team, with valuable experience of developing games over several console cycles. Across the company the staff love the opportunities to work on some fantastic IPs, bringing new life to established franchises is something we do enjoy.

> I don't know about being a nation of shopkeepers but I do believe we're a nation of creators
> *Paul Porter, Sumo Digital*

What does the future of Sumo look like?

Sumo's future remains focused on high quality, high production values for large scale projects, working collaboratively on global franchises. Logistically we continue to expand and grow the teams across all the studios in Nottingham, Sheffield and India. Building diverse, highly skilled teams is exciting.

What advice do you have for UK development studios and UK developers looking to start a new studio?

For studios already set up, stick to your principles and focus on what you and your teams enjoy doing, as that is what you'll do well.

For start ups, use the freely available tools and experiment. Whether it's modding or starting something new from scratch; show people, ask them to play and listen to feedback. Don't assume you know what people will like.

Go to as many industry events as possible. Lots of developers are very approachable and willing to share some of their hard learnt lessons. ■

Gareth Wilson, Design Director, Sumo Digital (Sheffield) – Crackdown 3

Crackdown 3 has been a pleasure to work on as we we're all huge fans of the original series. The game will be an Xbox One X launch title, as well as all of the Xbox One family and Windows. The technical and design support we've had from Microsoft has been fantastic. We've just come back from E3 where we showed the campaign side of the game to fans for the first time. The feedback from the show floor was fantastic, frankly we were blown away by how many people are fans of the original series and are looking forward to the next version.

Looking for work?

Sumo has hired a huge amount of talent over the last 18 months and are still recruiting heavily across most disciplines.

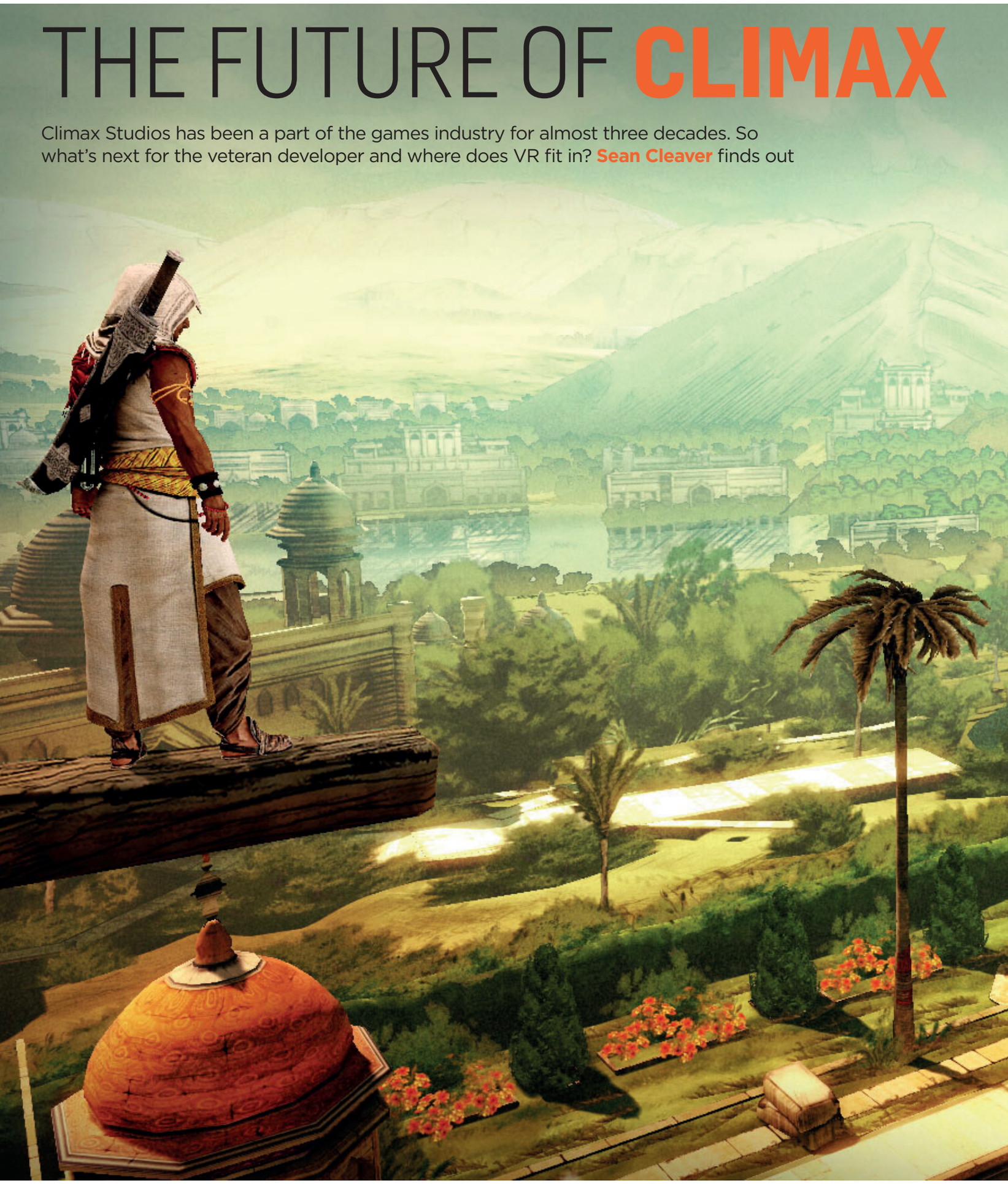
We are looking for experienced, triple-A console people at the top of their game who are looking for their next challenge and want to really make an impact on some incredible projects. In particular - executivepProducers, game designers, VFX artists, lighting. Across Sheffield and Nottingham we have over 25 live vacancies all on our website.

Sheffield now has over 290 staff and Nottingham has grown to over 50 within its first 18 months of opening.

Also of note is the success in recruitment of graduates in the past two years. Sumo is really reaping the benefits of investing in our talent pipeline via our placement and internship schemes; working with universities and competition sponsorship such as Search for a Star and Brains Eden.

THE FUTURE OF CLIMAX

Climax Studios has been a part of the games industry for almost three decades. So what's next for the veteran developer and where does VR fit in? **Sean Cleaver** finds out



Whenever we talk about British game studios, we often hear of the same places – Leamington Spa, Guildford, London. It's not often that we hear about Portsmouth on the South coast. But for nearly 30 years, Climax Studios has been down on the Solent, creating digital experiences and winning awards.

Surviving in games for that long is always a challenge and, much like the British games industry overall, is a balance of creativity and risk.

"It's a shame many of the leading lights have been acquired and ultimately either destroyed or absorbed by overseas owners, but that's no different from most British industry successes," says Climax CEO, Simon Gardner, who also believes that finding investment within the UK can be a problem. "Games is a creative business and finding risk capital is very difficult in the UK.

"This leads to owners inevitably looking for an exit that involves investors more willing to take risks and these are usually overseas companies. With the weak pound and political uncertainty there are probably bargains to be had. On the staffing front, there is a danger that the early lead provided by the 1980s home computing boom has now ended, despite valiant efforts from the likes of David Braben's (and others) Raspberry Pi, et al. The country really needs to push coding in schools."

"What is really good to see is that quick thinking, flexible studios have been able to adapt and take on new sectors, which has allowed them to flourish. I'm particularly impressed with Rebellion and Team17."

VIRTUAL TECHNOLOGY

Climax Studios sits in a rather expansive place in the games industry. As a creator of digital experiences, the studio has history in developing games for consoles and offering technical support to big companies like Sony and Microsoft. One area that Climax entered very early on is virtual reality.

"We made and published our first VR title over 3 years ago," says Gardner. "It was actually available on the Gear VR Innovator Edition, before launch of the commercial release. We were keen to be involved in this new hardware from the start. It was very exciting and clearly, for us, provided a fantastic means of gaining access to new technology and funding. Also, it was challenging for us and a way of allowing new channels of creativity, new ways of playing and finding new input devices. We've worked on around 15 VR and AR titles since that first VR release. Some of them didn't make release, but it's been an incredible opportunity to be at the forefront of a new sector.

> **Money is harder to come by... Think very carefully about who you share your company ownership with**
> *Simon Gardner, CEO, Climax Studios*

"Our market lead and company recognition has given us access to new hardware that we have been playing around with before it's even announced, let alone released. But that is only half of the Climax story. We have continued to develop console titles and we offer extensive technical, design and art resources to other companies. For example. we have been working with Amazon on their Lumberyard Engine. We built a VR demo called *Elevator Pitch* for GDC 2016 to showcase the VR capability of the engine and we have been working with their Seattle studio to provide example code in the form of the *Starter Game* project."

BALANCING CREATIVITY

One reason that Climax has excelled has been the incredible talent that the studio has been able to attract. "We are a diverse company and I think we had, at one point, 28 nationalities working here," Gardner explains. "You can hear all kinds of languages being spoken in the social areas of the studio. We actively hire from all over the world and enjoy the cultural mixing that this promotes. We embrace diversity and are seen as a relaxed and fun place to work. We have an A-rating with the UK Visas and Immigration service, which helps with our recruitment process. We try to support local charities and usually pay for any of our staff to enter local running events such as the Great South Run that takes place in Portsmouth each year."

This culture at the studio means that the team can make its own IPs alongside the contracted work without any negative impact to either area. Showing you can stay at the forefront of technology is key. Climax's most recent release, *Lola and the Giant*, was developed exclusively for Google's Daydream VR headset, and the studio is always creating.

"We've been lucky over the last three years to have managed to operate in a work for hire environment and retain our IP," says Gardner. "We have created eight new IPs over the last three years. Seven of these have been externally funded. This has been a big break with the traditional publisher/developer relationship. It's been refreshing and more importantly has been achieved with no equity loss.

"In reality, we have been able to raise just under $8M of funding to make our own games. This would probably have been a big headline had we done it through some sort of external investment. We've built a huge lead in VR and AR technology and experience. We now need to cross the 'gap of disappointment' and be one of the leading players in this amazing technology. "

FUTUREPROOF

It was Unity CEO, John Ricatello, who was one of the first to use the phrase 'gap of disappointment' to explain how VR is going to have lower sales despite the quality of products that are being made for the medium. Climax is very aware of this as Gardner looks to the future and offers advice for his peers.

"We are going to keep being involved in new technologies and build on our lead in VR and AR. We have several AR projects in development and see this as a technology that will touch everybody's lives.

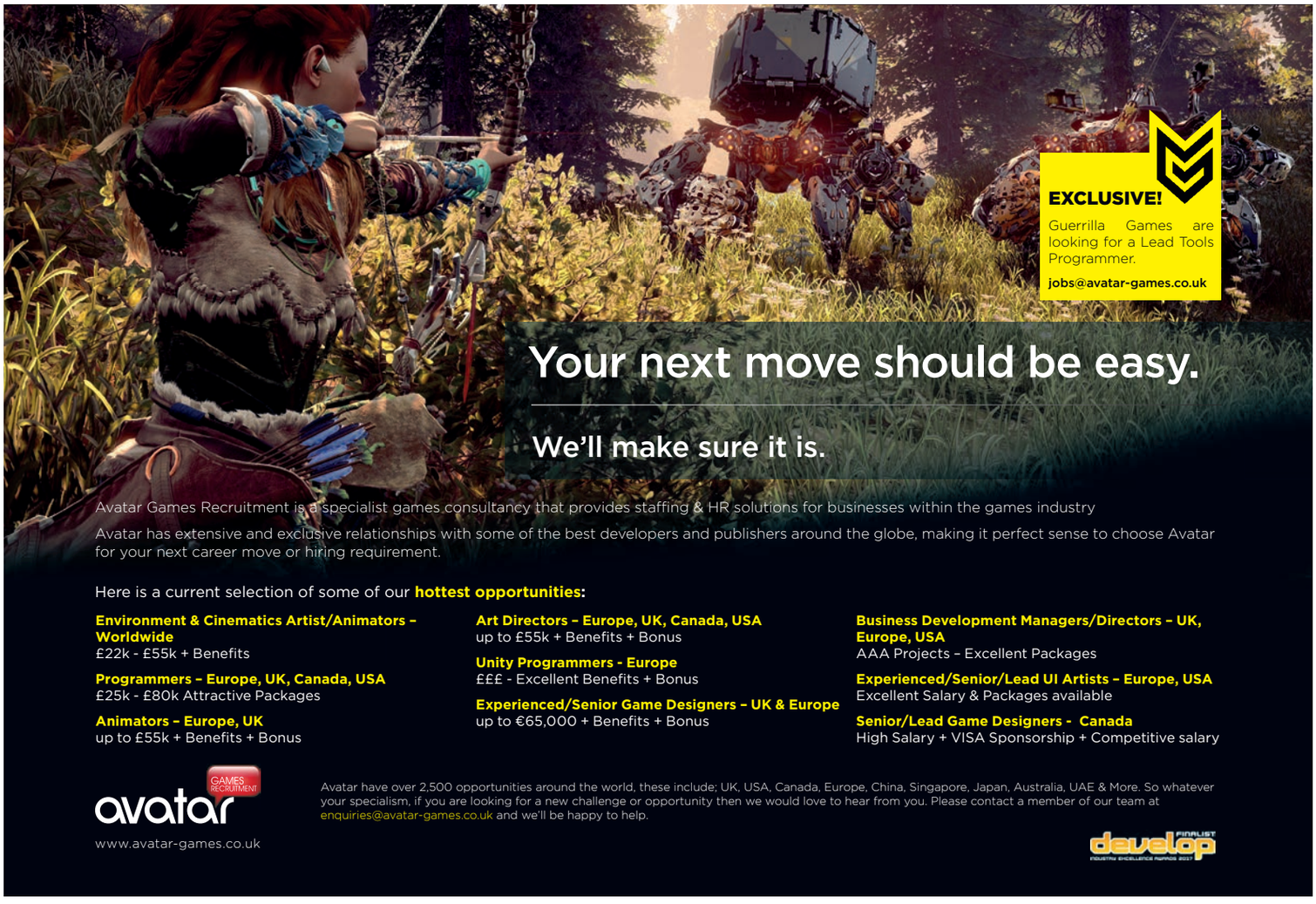
"However, it will also feedback into all of the other things we do and so Climax will continue to work in collaboration with and offer its expertise to other companies in the console and handheld space. The next big challenge is crossing that 'gap of disappointment' that has or will greet VR and be best placed to exploit the commercial opportunities once the

market rises to meet the technology. It happened in mobile and it will most likely happen in VR.

"Talk to fellow developers and companies and ask their opinions. Validate your amazing idea with a friendly publisher (under NDA) just in case you are overlooking some key information that invalidates it.

"Work out how you propose funding your project for at least three times as long as you think it is going to take. Money is harder to come by than you think. Amazing ideas would appear to be plentiful given the number of non-industry people that tell us they have a great game idea that we should pay for. Think very carefully who you share your company ownership with. Do they hold the same values and ethos as you and if not, find somebody else.

"I see a successful studio as being able to navigate the complexities of technology, creativity and management. The blend and emphasis of these things changes with the opportunities that arise and you just need to sometimes know when to be brave and when to hold the line. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with work for hire, you often get to work on some amazing licenses such as *Silent Hill* and *Assassins Creed*. We have worked alongside some huge, well-respected studios and contributed to their games." ■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£25k - £80k Attractive Packages
Animators – Europe, UK
up to £55k + Benefits + Bonus
Art Directors – Europe, UK, Canada, USA
up to £55k + Benefits + Bonus
Unity Programmers - Europe
£££ - Excellent Benefits + Bonus
Experienced/Senior Game Designers – UK & Europe
up to €65,000 + Benefits + Bonus
Business Development Managers/Directors – UK, Europe, USA
AAA Projects – Excellent Packages
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develop
FINALIST

BEST OF BRITISH

This month we're shining a light on the very greatest developers we could find among our fair green isles. Join us in celebrating the long legacy of Britain's games history, and its bright future as a global leader

Name: Bossa Studios
Founded: October 2010
Headcount: 44
Location: London, UK
Previous games: Monstermind, Surgeon Simulator 2013, Twelve a Dozen, I Am Bread, Spy_ Watch, Outlaw Poker, Surgeon Simulator VR: Meet The Medic
Current work: Worlds Adrift and Decksplash
Website: www.bossastudios.com
HR contact: Michael Christie (michael.christie@bossastudios.com)

London-based Bossa Studios is an independent games developer and publisher. We're the creators of the BAFTA hit *Surgeon Simulator*, BAFTA winning *Monstermind*, the highly-acclaimed *I am Bread*. We have recently released the incredibly ambitious massively multiplayer sandbox game, *Worlds Adrift*. With our titles being loved by millions of gamers worldwide, Bossa aims to create games for fun's sake. We're driven by doing things differently, creatively, with charm, with flair.

Chucklefish was originally formed in 2011 in order to develop extraterrestrial sandbox adventure game, *Starbound*. Since *Starbound*'s success, Chucklefish has gone on to partner with a number of small studios to release games like *Stardew Valley*, *Risk of Rain* and *Interstellaria*.

Now they're working on a couple of new in-house projects, including *Wargroove*, a turn-based strategy game aiming to be a modern take on classics like *Final Fantasy Tactics* and *Advance Wars*!

Name: Chucklefish
Founded: 2011
Headcount: 17
Location: London, UK
Previous games: Starbound, Stardew Valley, Interstellaria, Halfway, Risk of Rain, Wanderlust Adventures
Current work: Wargroove
Website: chucklefish.org
HR contact: contact@chucklefish.org

Name: Climax Studios
Founded: 1988
Headcount: 120+
Location: Portsmouth, UK
Previous games: Lola & The Giant, Silent Hill: Shattered Memories, Assassin's Creed Chronicles: India, Dirt Rally VR
Currently working on: Console and VR projects under NDA
Website: www.climaxstudios.com
HR contact: Stu Godfrey (stu@climaxstudios.com)

Founded in 1988, Climax is a team of 120+ dedicated experienced developers, with most of the senior management team having worked alongside each other for over a decade. Since its inception the studio has shipped over 80 products and well over 150 SKUs across all major platforms. Widely recognised as one of Europe's leading independent studios, Climax are licensed developers for all current platforms and are highly experienced utilising a wide range of technologies. Current and recent partners include Google, Amazon, Microsoft, Oculus, Codemasters, Sony, Konami.

Creative Assembly is one of the UK's leading games development studios. With a heritage of award-winning triple-A titles, including the multi-million selling *Total War* series, Creative Assembly continues to build an impressive portfolio of games and world-renowned partnerships; working with Games Workshop on *Total War: Warhammer*, Wargaming Alliance on *Total War: Arena*, Twentieth Century Fox on *Alien: Isolation*, plus 343 Industries and Microsoft on *Halo Wars 2*. Creative Assembly has amassed a wealth of awards, including recent accolades from BAFTA, Music+Sound and Develop.

Name: Creative Assembly
Founded: 1987
Headcount: 523
Location: Horsham, UK and Sofia, Bulgaria
Previous games: Rome: Total War, Empire: Total War, Shogun 2, Rome II, Alien: Isolation, Total War: Warhammer and Halo Wars 2
Currently working on: Total War: Warhammer II, Total War: Arena and more...
Website: www.creative-assembly.com
HR contact: Emma Smith, talent manager (jobs@creative-assembly.com)

Name: Criterion Games
Founded: 1993
Headcount: 90+
Location: Guildford, Surrey
Previous games:
Star Wars Battlefront – Rogue One: X-Wing VR, Need for Speed Most Wanted,
Currently working on:
New Unannounced IP, Star Wars Battlefront II
Website:
criteriongames.com
HR contact - Toby Eves, senior recruiter (teves@ea.com)

Criterion

Criterion is a talented team of people who live and breathe games of all kinds. In fact, gaming is so important to us that we purposefully have a chunk of time set aside to play games every day! Learning from the widest range of experiences makes our own games better. Our story began some years ago as a small studio of talented people who craft games with joy, passion, and commitment to quality. Growing over the years, we've nurtured our values of creative collaboration, diversity, honesty and unique perspectives. Our studio is a healthy mix of industry veterans and newcomers working together to inspire, support, and educate one another.

Name: Edge Case Games
Founded: September 2014
Headcount: 35
Location: Guildford
Previous games: None
Currently working on:
Fractured Space
Website:
www.fracturedspace.com

edgecase

At Edge Case Games we have always had our heads so far in the clouds, all we can see is stars. We grew up playing the likes of *Wing Commander*, *X-Wing vs TIE Fighter* and *Elite*. Our rooms were plastered in *Star Trek* posters and our duvet covers were adorned with C3PO and R2D2. If we were any closer to space we'd be blue in the face and in dire need of oxygen.

We were the team behind *Strike Suit Zero*, the dogfighting game first to ride the wave of space combat revival. Born Ready Games was set up to make that game but, while our team remains intact, our new project flies under a new banner. Edge Case Games.

Name: Freejam
Founded: 2013
Headcount: 47
Location: Portsmouth, UK
Currently working on:
Robocraft, Robocraft Infinity
Website:
robocraftgame.com/about/
HR contact:
sgodfrey@freejamgames.com

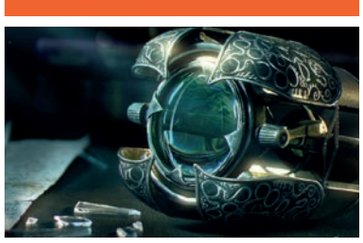
FREEJAM

Freejam is an independent games studio located in Portsmouth, UK which specialises in producing games that support user-generated content. The studio's first title *Robocraft* launched on PC in 2013 and boasts over 11 million player registrations worldwide. Currently the studio is working on future updates for *Robocraft* and is developing a standalone version for Windows 10 Store and Xbox One titled *Robocraft Infinity*, as well as prototypes for future unrevealed projects.

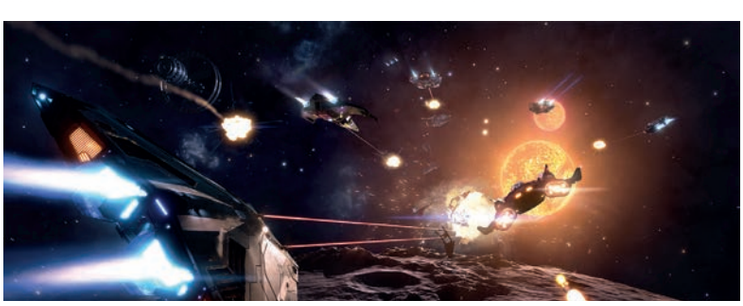
FIREPROOF GAMES

Fireproof began when six Criterion developers left EA to form Fireproof Studios, a freelance environment art & design studio, with the eventual aim of making our own games. After four years of working with great people all over the UK, we earned enough to hire a programmer & start working in earnest on our first game, *The Room*. The success of *The Room* allowed us to give up freelance work and recast ourselves as Fireproof Games. Since 2012 we've released four award-winning original titles & have two more in the works. Although we are well known in the mobile market, we hope in the next year or two to release original games for PC & console.

Name: Fireproof Games
Founded: August 2008
Headcount: 17
Location: Guildford, Surrey
Previous games: The Room, The Room Two, The Room Three, Omega Agent.
Current work: The Room Old Sins; unnamed PC/Console SciFi game
Website:
www.fireproofgames.com
HR contact: Barry Meade (barry@fireproofstudios.com)



Name: Frontier
Founded: 1994
Headcount: 320
Location: Cambridge
Previous games: LostWinds, Thrillville, RollerCoaster Tycoon 3, Zoo Tycoon
Currently working on:
Elite Dangerous, Planet Coaster and more...
Website: Frontier.co.uk
HR contact: Yvonne Dawes (ydawes@frontier.co.uk)



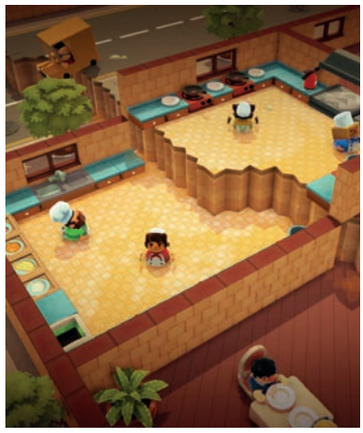
FRONTIER

Frontier strives to create games that will put both the studio and the games industry itself at the forefront of the world entertainment industry.

Frontier has thrived over three decades, building a uniquely diverse catalogue of games – enabled by our homegrown COBRA game development technology – featuring titles that have defined genres, earned critical acclaim and won a place in the hearts of millions of players.

Having worked with a succession of top publishers we now self-publish our own games across a number of different genres that each embody the studio's world-class expertise.

Name: Ghost Town Games
Founded: 2015
Headcount: 2 employees - Phil Duncan & Oli De-Vine.
Location: Cambridge, UK.
Previous works: Overcooked
Currently working on: Bringing Overcooked to the Nintendo Switch.
Website: www.ghosttowngames.com

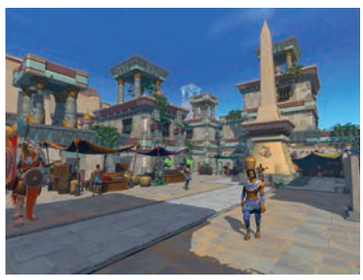


Ghost Town Games is a two person team made up of Phil Duncan and Oli De-Vine. They had been designing and making games together at Frontier Developments for 5 years before finally deciding to strike out on their own and explore making games together independently. Their debut game *Overcooked* was made from a lounge and took home the BAFTAs for Best Family Game and Best British Game. They have since upgraded to the spare room.

Name Hello Games
Founded August 2008
Headcount: Under 20
Location Guildford
Previous games Joe Danger, Joe Danger 2: The Movie, Joe Danger Infinity, No Man's Sky
Current work: No Man's Sky
Website www.nomanssky.com / www.hellogames.co.uk
HR contact Kelly Murrell (kelly@hellogames.co.uk)

HELLO GAMES

We're a tiny indie studio based in Guildford, UK. We're probably best known for *No Man's Sky*, a procedurally generated space exploration game featuring quintillions of planets (literally). We've spent the last year releasing two large updates for *No Man's Sky* and we're busy working on the next!



A success story for over 17 years and one that reported record results for FY16, Jagex is home to iconic MMORPG *RuneScape*, a living world that has been inhabited by over 250 million players in its lifetime. Jagex is renowned for delivering deep and engaging online worlds and running them as world-class live services. The *RuneScape* franchise continues to go from strength to strength, powered by community-driven development and with moves into competitive gaming and mobile.

Name: Jagex
Founded: 2001
Headcount: 325
Location: Cambridge, UK
Live Games: RuneScape (PC), Old School RuneScape (PC)
Currently working on: RuneScape Expansions, RuneScape franchise extensions, mobile, VR, and new product development.
Website: www.jagex.com
HR contact: Pete Lovell (recruitment@jagex.com)

JAGEX

Name: Just Add Water
Founded: 2006
Headcount: 6
Location: Leeds
Previous games: Oddworld: New n Tasty, Gravity Crash Ultra, Micro Machines, Volume, I am Bread, Lumo
Currently working on: Secret Movie License, Secret Shooty game, Secret Robot game & Super Gravity Crash Ultra (for PS4).
Website: http://www.jawltd.com

Just Add Water (Development), Ltd. was founded in 2006 by career developer Stewart Gilray. Creating the Sony published retro shooter *Gravity Crash* for PS3 and PSP. JAW went on to work with Oddworld Inhabitants, on titles such as, *Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath HD* and *Oddworld: New 'n' Tasty*. Since, the team has worked on *Volume* for PS4/VITA, *I am Bread* for PS4, *Poncho* for PS4, *Lumo* for consoles, *Volume: CODA* for PlayStation VR and *Micro Machines World Series* for Codemasters, with other titles in development for release during 2017 and beyond.

Mm

Media Molecule, part of SIE Worldwide Studios, are a development studio based in Guildford. Formed in 2006, they are the studio behind the multi-award winning games *LittleBigPlanet*, *LittleBigPlanet 2*, *Tearaway*, *Tearaway Unfolded* and are currently building the next generation of Play, Create and Share for PlayStation 4: *Dreams*.

Name: Media Molecule
Founded: 2006
Headcount: Approx.50
Location: Guildford
Previous games: LittleBigPlanet, LittleBigPlanet 2, Tearaway, Tearaway Unfolded
Currently working on - Dreams
Website: www.mediamolecule.com
HR contact: jobs@mediamolecule.com

Name: Mediatonic
Founded: 2005
Headcount: 110
Location: London & Brighton
Previous games: Heavenstrike Rivals, Amateur Surgeon, Foul Play
Currently working on: Fable Fortune & unannounced titles
Website: www.mediatonicgames.com
HR contact: recruitment@mediatonicgames.com

Mediatonic is one of the UK's largest independent game developers. We aim to make long lasting games of the highest quality for millions of players.

Story and narrative have been in our DNA since our foundation more than a decade ago; we like to build worlds that live beyond our games and mean something to our players.

Typically, we have three games in development run by autonomous, ambitious teams in an open, collaborative & down to earth environment.

Name: Ninja Theory
Founded: 2004
Headcount: approx 100
Location: Cambridge, UK
Previous games: Heavenly Sword, Kung Fu Chaos, Enslaved: Odyssey to the West, DmC: Devil May Cry, Disney Infinity 3.0, Fightback, DEXED
Currently working on: Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice
Website: www.ninjatheory.com
HR contact: hr@ninjatheory.com

Ninja Theory is an award-winning game development studio based in Cambridge, England, known for pushing the boundaries of technology, art and storytelling in video games. Founded in 2004, Ninja Theory is best known for creating *Heavenly Sword*, *Enslaved: Odyssey to the West*, *DmC: Devil May Cry* and *Disney Infinity 3.0* for consoles and PC. Clients include Sony Computer Entertainment, Microsoft Games Studios, Capcom, Bandai Namco and Disney Interactive Studios.

Name: Playground Games
Founded: 2010
Headcount: 150+
Location: Leamington Spa
Previous games: Forza Horizon series
Current work: Two triple-A open world projects
Website: www.playground-games.com
HR contact: Nick Duncombe, resource manager

Playground Games was established in 2010, bringing together some of the most experienced and talented developers from the UK industry, with the vision to create genre-defining titles for a global audience. Since then, we've created three critically-acclaimed, award-winning hits in *Forza Horizon*, *Forza Horizon 2* and *Forza Horizon 3* – in total, our *Horizon* games have garnered more than 100 'Best Of' awards. We've also supported those games, long after launch, with a rich variety of free and premium downloadable content, delivering new and exciting experiences to *Horizon* fans.

Name: Playtonic Games
Founded: 2015
Headcount: 25
Location: Burton-on-Trent
Previous games: Yooka-Laylee
Currently working on: Yooka-Laylee (Nintendo Switch) & secret stuff
Website: www.playtonicgames.com
HR contact: jobs@playtonicgames.com

Founded in 2015 by games industry veterans, Playtonic Games is an independent developer based in Burton-on-Trent, UK. Between them, the Playtonic team has over 150 years of combined experience working on legendary gaming franchises such as the *Banjo-Kazooie*, *Donkey Kong Country* and *Viva Piñata* series of games. Playtonic recently shipped its debut title as a new company, the much-anticipated 3D platformer, *Yooka-Laylee*, following the UK's most successful ever games Kickstarter campaign. Following a significant expansion in 2017, the Playtonic team is now stronger than ever and ready to embark on an ambitious future.

Name: Rare
Founded:1985
Headcount: 100+
Location: Twycross, UK
Previous games: Rare Replay, Viva Piñata, Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts&Bolts, Perfect Dark Zero, GoldenEye, Battletoads
Current work Sea of Thieves
Website: www.rare.co.uk
HR contact: rarecareers@microsoft.com

Established in 1985, Rare has developed classic titles like *Battletoads*, *Donkey Kong Country* and *GoldenEye*, among others. Acquired by Microsoft Game Studios in 2002, Rare supported the Xbox 360 debut by launching *Kameo: Elements of Power* and *Perfect Dark Zero* while also helping pioneer Xbox 360 Avatars. More recently, Rare brought fans the *Kinect Sports* series and *Rare Replay*. The team is hard at work on bringing gamers the brand new, highly anticipated, shared-world pirate adventure *Sea of Thieves*.

Name: Rebellion
Founded: 1992
Headcount: 200+
Location: Oxford, UK
Previous games: Sniper Elite 4, Battlezone, Zombie Army Trilogy
Currently working on: Strange Brigade, Rogue Trooper Redux
Website: www.rebellion.com
HR contact:
Claire Timpany
(info@rebellion.co.uk)

Formed in 1992 by brothers Chris and Jason Kingsley, Rebellion has been at the forefront of the independent UK development scene for 25 years. Now focused on their own IP, such as the *Sniper Elite* series and the critically acclaimed VR title *Battlezone*, Rebellion has also worked on numerous high-profile licenses including *Aliens vs. Predator*, *Star Wars* and *The Simpsons*. Additionally, Rebellion owns the legendary 2000 AD comic brand – home to the likes of *Judge Dredd* and *Rogue Trooper*. Rebellion is opening up 2000 AD's licences to third-party developers and are welcoming pitches now. We welcome speculative applications to work at the studio, and current vacancies can be found on the site.

Name: Rocksteady Studios
Founded: 2004
Headcount: 150
Location: London
Previous games: Urban Chaos: Riot Response, Batman: Arkham Asylum, Batman: Arkham City, Batman: Arkham Knight, Batman: Arkham VR
Website:
http://rocksteadyltd.com/
HR contact:
jobs@rocksteadyltd.com

Here at Rocksteady we've spent the last ten years developing the *Batman: Arkham* series, and the reaction we get from our fans all over the world is still one of the very best parts of the job. We built our studio in North London as a completely open-plan space, so every member of our 150-strong team can talk face to face and work together without barriers. We think that helps us make better games. We're incredibly proud of our facilities, including a state-of-the-art motion and performance capture studio, our world-class 3D scanning rig... and one of the best coffee machines in London.

Name: Roll7
Founded: 2008
Headcount: 20
Location: Various UK (Remote Studio)
Previous games: OlliOlli, OlliOlli2: Welcome to Olliwood, NOT A HERO
Current working on:
Laser League
Website; www.roll7.co.uk
HR contact; jobs@roll7.co.uk

Roll7 are a multi-award winning independent games studio formed in London, UK. Founded in 2008 as a digital agency, the team developed a number of games, applications and campaigns for clients, however began work on original IP in 2012. Roll7 is best known for skateboarding series *OlliOlli*, which won a BAFTA for Best Sports Game. In 2015 the studio released pixel shooter *NOT A HERO* to rave reviews and immediate cult status. The team are now working on *Laser League*, a light speed, high octane future sports title.

Nestled beside Sony Interactive Entertainment's European headquarters, London Studio is based in the heart of creative Soho, London. Since forming in 2001, the development teams have sought to break new ground and not be defined by what's gone before. The studio supports new and emergent PlayStation technologies and aims to broaden the PlayStation player base by creating content for gamers and non-gamers alike.

Name: London Studio
Founded: 2001
Headcount: Approx. 100
Location: London, UK
Previous games: PlayStation VR WORLDS, SingStar Ultimate Party, Wonderbook: Book of Potions, Wonderbook: Book of Spells and EyePet.
Currently working on:
SingStar Celebration
Website
www.worldwidestudios.net/london
HR contact:
www.playstationjobs.co.uk

Name: Slightly Mad Studios
Founded: 2009
Headcount: 160+
Location: Worldwide with studio near Tower Bridge, London
Previous games: Need For Speed: SHIFT, Shift 2 Unleashed, Project CARS
Currently working on: Project CARS 2, Unannounced Title
Website:
www.slightlymadstudios.com
HR contact:
jobs@slightlymadstudios.com

Founded in 2009, we're the award-winning team behind the *Project CARS* franchise, and era-defining games such as the *GTR* series, *Need For Speed SHIFT*, *Shift 2 Unleashed*, *Red Bull Air Race – The Game*, and many other top-tier games.

With over ten years of pedigree in creating tripl-A games, we're a 160-strong group of professionals working from either our hub in Central London, or worldwide via our unique and award-winning distributed dev system.

Name: Supermassive Games
Founded: 2008
Headcount: 125
Location: Guildford, UK
Previous games: Until Dawn, Start The Party, Until Dawn: Rush of Blood, Tumble VR
Currently working on: Bravo Team (PSVR), Hidden Agenda (PS4), The Inpatient (PSVR)
Website: www.supermassivegames.com/
HR contact: Jonathan Amor (jobs@supermassivegames.com)

Founded in 2008, we are a BAFTA-winning, independent game developer with a reputation for innovation in both storytelling and VR. We have released a number of successful titles and are best known for the critically acclaimed PS4 hit *Until Dawn*. We recently announced three new titles coming for 2017 - *Bravo Team* (PSVR), *Hidden Agenda* (PS4) and *The Inpatient* (PSVR). With a passion to deliver both high-end interactive drama and boundary-breaking VR, Supermassive Games is carving a unique and exciting path in the games industry.

Name: Team17
Founded: 1990
Headcount: 100
Location: Development office in Wakefield and commercial office in Nottingham
Previous games
Most recently developed: Worms W.M.D and The Escapists: The Walking Dead
Co-developed: The Escapists, Sheltered and Beyond Eyes
Most recently published: Yooka-Laylee and Overcooked
Currently working on: The Escapists 2 and supporting lots of exciting games from our games label partners!
Website: www.team17.com
HR contact: Susan Clarkson (susan.clarkson@team17.com)

Founded in 1990, Team17 Digital Limited is a leading international games developer and award-winning games label that hosts the *Worms* franchise, *Aven Colony*, *The Escapists*, *Genesis Alpha One*, *Overcooked*, *Yoku's Island Express*, *Yooka-Laylee*, *Way to the Woods* and many more from developers around the world.

Responsible for the best-selling and BAFTA-winning *LEGO* videogame series, TT Games is in the business of delighting children and grown-ups alike. With more than 25 years of success behind our Traveller's Tales studio, and as a valued part of Warner Bros. since 2007, we have incredibly exciting plans for future titles based on the world's biggest entertainment properties. We're also extremely proud to have been joined this year by Playdemic, one of the UK's most successful free-to-play mobile games developers and publishers. Their most recent title, *Golf Clash*, is a top-grossing smash hit on iOS and Android.

Name: Tt Games
Founded: Traveller's Tales was founded in 1989. Tt Games was established in 2005 with the merger of games publisher Giant Interactive and Traveller's Tales. The group has since grown to include the games development studio TT Fusion, and Mobile developer and publisher Playdemic.
Headcount: 650+
Location: Knutsford, Wilmslow & Maidenhead
Previous games:
LEGO City Undercover, LEGO Marvel Super Heroes, The LEGO Movie Videogame, LEGO The Hobbit, LEGO Ninjago Nindroids, LEOG Batman 3: Beyond Gotham, LEGO Ninjago: Shadow of Ronin, LEGO Jurassic World, LEGO Marvel Avengers, LEGO Dimensions, LEGO Star Wars: The Force Awakens, LEGO Worlds.
Website: www.ttgames.com
HR contact: Vicky MacMillan, recruiter (vicky.macmillan@t-tales.com)

Wales Interactive is a multi-award winning video games developer & publisher. We pride ourselves in being an unshackled independent developer making our own ideas exclusively from our Pencoed studio in South Wales. This includes all writing, design, programming, art, music, marketing and we even publish our own games. As well as creating our own titles we have evolved into an Indie Game Publishing Label collaborating with some of the most talented indie games developers across the globe to help bring their original creations to new platforms.

Name: Wales Interactive
Founded: 2012
Headcount: 10
Location: Pencoed, South Wales
Previous games: Late Shift, The Bunker, Soul Axiom, Knee Deep, Coffin Dodgers, Infinity Runner, Master Reboot, Gravity Badgers.
Currently working on: Don't Knock Twice - VR Horror Game (PSVR, HTC Vive & Oculus)
Website: www.walesinteractive.com
HR contact: info@walesinteractive.com

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SCORING ARK: **SURVIVAL EVOLVED**

John Broomhall talks with composer ace Gareth Coker about the iconic Abbey Road Studios and how scoring ARK: Survival Evolved became a unique production process

When Gareth Coker created a handful of cues with sample libraries for the original Early Access release of *ARK: Survival Evolved*, he could never have imagined what was to come.

A full two years later, he'd be flying into London to record 140 minutes of music with a best of British orchestra at the UK's legendary Abbey Road Studios for the game, which Coker reckons has now clocked up approximately 10 million sales.

Developing music onwards from that original offering has been a challenging though exciting proposition, as Coker explains: "When you change something millions of people have been living with for two years – any change in the aesthetic can affect some of the player-base and they'll want to know what you're playing at. Instead of the film scenario of a director who's got used to a temp track, you're dealing with the general public who've invested early into the game and might now love what you considered a temp track – there's a gigantic ripple effect on social media and game forums."

SO HOW DO YOU NAVIGATE THAT CHALLENGE?

"Obviously you want to please everyone, but with millions of people, it's impossible. I trained myself to look for consistent crossover between the game team's feedback and public. I was wary of taking too much notice of negative stuff when the majority is really positive - but this is easier said than done. On the other hand, from the age of four years, I've played more games than I've watched movies or TV shows so I feel like I understand the medium and how music should works in it. This particular situation reinforced that I have to trust my own instincts, put it out there and see what people think, particularly on composition - though feedback on implementation can be very helpful. Plus it's incredibly useful, and unique to an Early Access title, to be able to see hours of players' gameplay captures on Twitch or YouTube.

"Studio Wildcard's co-founders Jesse Rapczak and Jeremy Stieglitz had this crazy idea for a game and kind of caught lightning in a bottle.

> **It's incredibly useful, and unique to an Early Access title, to be able to see hours of players' gameplay captures**
> *Gareth Coker*

They trusted their instincts and in turn, I'm grateful they trusted mine. Especially when it came to Abbey Road. We met at GDC and discussed how a live recording would really elevate (especially) this kind of music, which needs real force behind it, notably in the brass. I asked do you want this to sound like the biggest thing ever and they were like – yeah, that sounds great - what do you need? I told them about Abbey Road Studio One being probably the biggest purpose-built recording room in the world and if we stuck 90 players in it, the results would sound enormous. They thought it over and said 'let's go'.

"Top London players are the best in the world plus you have amazing crew and the secret sauce of Abbey Road engineering. I stepped out to introduce myself to the orchestra and for the first time ever I had imposter syndrome. I've got Simon Rhodes in the control room who's worked extensively with James Horner, and in front of me, The Philharmonia Orchestra with their massive track record in films and games. Suddenly the crushing weight of the history of that room hit me in the face - I had to take a deep breath for sure and shake the nerves off. Then they started playing and it was exactly how I'd imagined. They were magnificent through 18 hours of recording plus six hours of percussion sessions. It was probably the best three days of my professional life and I really don't have enough good things to say about the experience. It's been quite a journey." ■

John Broomhall is a game audio specialist creating and directing music, sound and dialogue **www.johnbroomhall.co.uk**

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GREAT **BRITAIN**

How do veteran developers feel about the next five years of the UK games industry?

The games industry in the UK has enjoyed a great revitalisation. According to Ukie figures from 2016, it contributes £4.2bn to the UK economy. Tax breaks and investment in digital industries are reaping the rewards of this growth, but we are about to hit uncertain times. Brexit and the lack of a clear indication of a deal on movement of labour and trade hang over everyone. It's a very different position to where we were five years ago.

"It's certainly changed," says Sports Interactive studio director, Miles Jacobson. "Many of the larger studios that were around five years ago aren't,

(L-R) Stig Strand, Dr. Jo Twist, Mick Hocking, Gav Raeburn, David Braben OBE and Ian Livingstone CBE

replaced by others growing and a huge increase in the amount of indies and micro-studios. We're around 20 per cent larger than we were back then."

"The UK development industry looked like it was in decline five years ago, with studios closing at an alarming rate," remembers Playground Games CEO, Gav Raeburn. "In retrospect, I think what was happening was just a rebalancing of the books. The games market was changing and UK development was restructuring to meet those needs."

"The UK Games map now lists 2,141 active games studios in the UK," says Ukie CEO, Dr Jo Twist. "The UK also leads Europe for mobile development and this, along with the explosion of VR and AR, has contributed to a number of studios choosing to set up in the UK."

"It's hard for one company to talk about the whole industry," says Codemasters VP of product development, Mick Hocking. "But here, the last two years have seen a period of rapid growth, focused on acquiring the best new talent to expand our seasoned internal teams. We've hired more than 90 new staff, and expanded our internal development capability by more than 40 per cent, including the entire team from Evolution Studios who joined us in April 2016. The success of games together with the introduction of the R&D Tax credits has allowed us to not only hire more staff, but increase the rewards for those already with us."

> **Games have become part of mainstream culture and are as socially, culturally and economically important as music and film**
>
> *Ian Livingstone CBE, chairman, Sumo Digital*

ALWAYS LEARNING

One of the main reasons for the growth in the games industry in the UK has been the speed by which it has embraced changes in technology. "The video games industry is transformed by advances in technology like no other entertainment industry," says Sumo Digital chairman, Ian Livingston CBE.

"With that comes challenges and opportunities. Whilst the industry is reliant as ever on talented software engineers, designers, artists and animators, the increase in digital distribution and changing business models has resulted in a sharp increase in demand for a range of new skills such as back end server engineers, data scientists and analysts. And it won't stop there."

"Studios have also embraced the importance of analytics, digital marketing and community management," says managing director of recruitment specialists, Aardvark Swift, Ian Goodall. "Understanding your userbase can really help drive revenue, and we've seen these roles go from a single employee, to whole teams and departments."

However, the demand for new skills and training is high, especially as uncertainty over access to the EU's vast talent pool looms due to Brexit negotiations. "We must continue to push for the open movement of people and call on the government to provide alternative support for UK studios unable to access European funding in order to maintain our position on the world stage," says Goodall. "Investing in our own home-grown talent and supporting the development of students and graduates is also just as vital."

"Overall the games industry in the UK has suffered from the lack of computer scientists being trained in the UK," says Frontier Developments CEO David Braben OBE. "It began when teaching computer science at schools was stopped due to a change in educational policy around 1999 and replaced with 'ICT' – low-demand study in the use of Powerpoint, Excel and Word. Solving this problem was one of the reasons I eventually co-founded Raspberry Pi."

THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

So what is to come for the next five years? By then we will have been out of the EU for three years and new iterations of technological power will be available to developers and consumers. So how does the UK stay ahead and continue to grow?

"The UK games sector will continue to be a global leader in games development," says Ukie's Dr. Jo Twist. "We need to ensure the talent pipeline coming through is diverse and has the relevant blend of business, arts, and science, and we need to continue to invest in programming literacy in younger years at schools. More girls need to be taking computing subjects in particular: the more diverse the workforce making games, the better the content is that we will make.

"The UK is well known for embracing and being at the forefront of emerging trends, and so it is important that we continue to be

supporting new talent, fostering the right business and creative environment for new ideas to grow and prosper. The next five years look extremely bright, but it is not without some political uncertainties."

Stig Strand of recruitment specialist Amiqus also believes that encouraging more women to join the games industry workforce is key. "In 2016, Creative Skillset revealed that only 19 per cent of the games industry workforce is female, compared to the UK average of 45 per cent. We believe there is no reason why it shouldn't be 50 per cent."

"I believe the future is bright for game development in Britain," says Playground's Gav Raeburn. "We are currently seeing increasing investment from overseas and continued support from government through tax and R&D credits. I'm hopeful that this growth, and government support, will continue well into the future."

"We would like to see an expansion of the R&D tax credits programme," says Codemasters' Mick Hocking. "More efforts towards the development of the next generation of games industry talent through the integration of games industry related elements to the curriculum, greater support for learning and development and apprenticeships programmes within our industry, and stronger industry ties with academia."

"Games have become part of mainstream culture and are as socially, culturally and economically important as music and film," says Ian Livingston. "I would like to see greater recognition of the success of the UK games industry by mainstream media and government to send a positive message to parents, teachers and investors about the opportunities that this great industry offers. I would like to see better understanding of the sector by the investment community."

"Our target should not be sustaining our position, but improving it," argues David Braben. "Education is a key part of sustaining our position, but it is also important for us to value games development as a nation. Younger people have seen games development as a great industry to work in, but there has been a pressure from the older generations that work in this sector is not 'respectable'. This is changing, particularly as our status within the wider entertainment industry is changing.

"Technology continues its inexorable advance, bringing ever more exciting and sophisticated techniques within reach for videogames. I'd like to see our industry use this incredibly favourable situation to continue its progression towards taking its place as the world's premiere form of entertainment, culturally and artistically as well as commercially." ■

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

The latest high-profile hires and promotions

HUTCH

There's a duo of new starters for mobile developer Hutch this month. Rachel Edwards joins as a producer following time with racing publishers Codemasters and Natural Motion, and Corentin Delprat joins as a senior designer following stints at Gameloft and Square Enix. Both Edwards and Delprat will be supporting existing and new projects in development.

AUTODESK

Hilmar Koch has joined middleware provider Autodesk in a newly created position, head of R&D. Formerly of ILMxLAB, Koch joins the owner of the 3D Studio Max and Maya 3D modelling packages to head a new team looking at building storytelling tools to help their media and entertainment divisions.

CONSPEXIT

Former Yahoo regional vice president, Glen Drury, has joined the board of start-up studio Conspexit Ltd. The company is formed of many games industry veterans, such as ex-Sony creative director Claire Boissiere who worked on *PSVR Worlds,* and are currently building software to help people with visual impairments.

BLAZING GRIFFIN

Four new people have joined the Edinburgh based studio: Senior artist Sean Wenham, senior programmer Jenny Thornton, programmer Alex McFarlane and marketing officer Claudia Fiorillo. However the company is still recruiting and will be at Develop: Brighton, eager to meet potential new candidates. Feel free to visit the Blazing Griffin stand at the conference and have a chat.

GET THAT **JOB**

This month: QA manager at Bossa Studios, **Damien Peter**

What is your job role?

My role is to ensure all Bossa Studios games consistently release both with the quality we strive to achieve and especially what our players deserve. This involves me working with the development team, producers and other teams in the studio to highlight bugs which are found by our internal QA team and the wider community. I also provide guidance and advice to the QA team in order to ensure that our games are tested thoroughly and efficiently.

What qualifications and/or experience do you need?

I've been part of the industry for about 15 years, having previously worked at companies such as Sony, Microsoft, Sega and Electronic Arts. I've worked on a wide variety of different games and experienced a number of different test approaches, and I feel that experience allows me to better advise the QA and development teams on the best approach to take. I have a degree in computer science, which allows me to interpret information coming from the development teams.

The QA team at Bossa has a variety of different interests and academic backgrounds, from games design to programming to audio. This allows us to approach testing from different perspectives. It is important to recognise every project we work on is different and represents a different challenge to us in terms of QA, and is especially the case here at Bossa if you consider how different *Surgeon Simulator* is from *I Am Bread* and *Worlds Adrift*.

If you were interviewing someone, what do you look for?

Rule one: Passion. You have to be passionate about games and have a desire to make them better and as good as they can be - although you do not necessarily need to be good at them. I'm not, if I am honest.

In addition, you need be able to show you have an inquisitive mindset. In terms of Bossa Studios, I'd say you need to be also a dab hand with a Nerf gun and have a sweet tooth.

> **You need to be a dab hand with a Nerf gun and have a sweet tooth**

What opportunities are there for career progression?

One of the misconceptions of QA is that it is just an entry level position. Being a member of QA within a games development studio is a fantastic way of gaining exposure to all development disciplines (art, design, code, production, etc.) and the QA team here at Bossa also participates in game jams at the studio.

There is a defined career path though with QA which you can aspire to- starting as a QA tester, you can become a senior tester where you can be responsible for projects or project areas, to a lead tester and finally to my position as QA manager. Alternatively, you can become a technical QA tester, otherwise known as a software development engineer in test (SDET), where you will be responsible for coding test automation or tools which allows the QA team to focus on making sure the player experience is as good as it can possibly be. ■

SKILLS AND **TRAINING**

This month: NFTS Head of games, Alan Thorn, talks us through the MA Games Design course and the success of its former students

The National Film and Television School offer MA Games Design
Address: Beaconsfield Studios, Station Rd, Beaconsfield HP9 1LG
T: 01494 671234
E: games@nfts.co.uk
W: www.nfts.co.uk/games

The National Film and Television school now comes up regularly in conversation, especially in terms of successful graduates in media. Games are no different as the NFTS offer a two year MA in Games Design. "We also offer courses (like screenwriting and marketing) which cross-pollinate with games and the games course," explains head of games, Alan Thorn.

The NFTS has quickly made connections within the games industry as well. "We've arranged visits for students to game studios and have been visited by Supermassive Games, Sony, Bossa Studios and lots more," Thorn says. "In fact, many of our graduates landed jobs at some of these companies. For example, our graduates Naomi Kotler (winner of the Women in Games Breakthrough Talent Award) and Manos Agianniotakis are now at Supermassive Games.

"Our course is taught by many people from the industry, some on a regular tutor basis, and others are invited to deliver workshops, talks and presentations. Students get lots of one-to-one time with professionals.

"Our curriculum, and its supporting software and tools, are constantly evolving to align with industry trends. This ensures that our course stays ahead of the curve.

"From a hardware perspective, each student enjoys a high-performance dual-monitor gaming-PC for testing and development. These systems are super smooth. They have a newly constructed games studio environment with 24/7 access. We have VR equipment, a PS4 DevKit for making console games, graphics tablets for hand-crafting textures and models, and tablet PCs for making mobile games, among others! For software, we use the high-end Unity engine for development, and Maya and other tools. The course is a giant marathon, designed to stretch specific design and development muscles that add to an extensive portfolio."

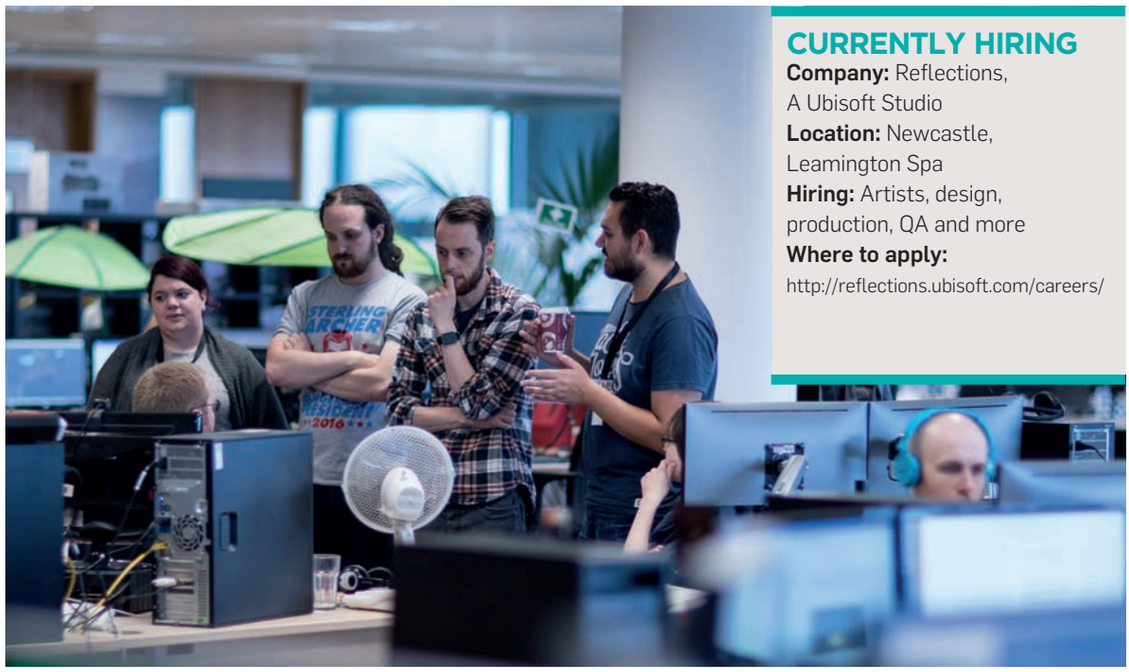
So, why should students look to the NFTS over other institutions? "Our course is truly unique and beautiful," says Thorn. "Our ethos is that people from all backgrounds and walks of life can become successful games developers. You don't need a background in programming or art to come here. You don't actually need a degree. You need passion, talent, strong ideas, some life-experience and a determination to succeed in life." ■

RECRUITER **HOT** SEAT: **UBISOFT REFLECTIONS**

Talent acquisition manager, **Craig Pearn**, tells us all about the benefits of working at Reflections, a bit of history behind the three decade old studio and its new studio in Leamington Spa

What differentiates your studio from other developers?

Reflections is one the longest running game development studios in the UK, with a heritage of over 30 years. We've contributed to the development of some of Ubisoft's biggest games such as *Tom Clancy's The Division*, *Watch Dogs 2* and most recently *Far Cry 5*. However, we also remain committed to creating smaller experimental titles as well as innovating on vehicle design and development. It's the variety of activities we have at our studio that sets us apart from other game developers. What's even better is we're now operating across two different locations – our Reflections studio in Newcastle and our newly opened Ubisoft Leamington studio.



CURRENTLY HIRING

Company: Reflections, A Ubisoft Studio
Location: Newcastle, Leamington Spa
Hiring: Artists, design, production, QA and more
Where to apply: http://reflections.ubisoft.com/careers/

How many staff are you looking to take on?

We're currently expanding our teams quite substantially and so we're looking to recruit new talent across all job disciplines. We have a strong focus on growing our environment art teams in both Newcastle and Leamington Spa as well as recruiting art, design and engineering leads. Over the next 12 months, we plan to add 70-80 new people across both studios.

What perks are available to staff working at your studio?

We believe in making life both easy and enjoyable for our staff and so we offer a comprehensive package of employee benefits. Everyone that joins Reflections will receive or have access to 25 days of annual leave plus one 'Hassle Free Day', maternity and paternity support, private medical care, relocation packages for new recruits and a wellbeing allowance for fitness and wellbeing activities. Our social club organises and pays for external events such as snowboarding, rally car driving and trips to local attractions.

We've also just introduced a new sabbatical programme called Press Pause, which allows team members to request 1-3 months of time off after 5 years of service.

We also provide free fruit, tea and coffee in the studios, as well as a selection of bread and cereals so our teams can start their day on a full stomach – we know that the little things matter too!

What should aspiring developers do with their CV to get an interview?

Always make sure your CV is updated and includes working links to any of your online sites and your portfolio, correct dates of employment and list your responsibilities. I like to receive a covering letter with every application to tell me about your motivation for applying and a little bit of background about you as a person.

What advice would you give for an interview at your studio?

Research our history, research our games and make sure you have read the job description and have a clear understanding. Also, be yourself – we want people that join us to be comfortable being themselves. We like our interviews to be as informal as possible and we try to have some fun in the process so we can get to know the individuals we are meeting.

> **Research our history, research our games**
> *Craig Pearn, Reflections*

I recently interviewed a junior programmer who really impressed me. Throughout the recruitment process, this person performed exceptionally demonstrating good knowledge and strong potential. Over and above that though, what I liked was his ambition to progress. He chose Reflections as he recognised that the opportunity to work alongside a senior team would help him evolve to the next level in his career more rapidly.

If you have recruited internationally, what is the process like?

We consider ourselves a diverse studio, with staff from over 20 countries working with us. In the last six months, we've recruited people from the US, South Korea, Canada, Russia and across Europe but the process is the same for any candidate. We take responsibility for the immigration process if required and are on hand every step of the way to answer questions and offer support. We really try to take away as much of the stress as possible during a time that can be challenging, especially for those with families.

Why should developers join you when indie development is so accessible in the games industry?

Reflections opened its doors over 30 years ago. It's a well-established studio with a secure future where people can evolve and grow.

We pride ourselves on growing careers here at Reflections, while giving our employees a huge amount of creative freedom to support their growth. ■

Follow us at: **@develop_jobs #DevelopJobs**
To see our full jobs board, sign up for our jobs newsletter or to post your own job ads, visit: **www.develop-online.net/jobs**

ASK AMIQUS

Liz Prince, business manager at recruitment specialist Amiqus, helps solve some of the trickier problems job seekers currently face in the games industry

Q How much does new gaming technology require developers to learn new skills, and how does it affect finding talent?

Games technology has always been evolving and learning new skills has always been a prerequisite for games industry professionals. In recent years, since the smartphone and tablet explosion, cross platform accessibility has become a major theme within game development. On top of this comes the continued evolution in next gen console hardware, 4K gaming and VR. With such exponential development, how can we be sure the skills keep up?

Perhaps surprisingly, despite its continued evolution, core skills tend not to change that much within games. Even for the newest, cutting edge tech areas such as VR, the core code base is still built on object oriented programming and hasn't moved far away from C++ and C# for some time.

On the art side there is demand for assets and environments created using Physics Based Rendering (PBR) and again these skills are fully transferrable. When it comes to software, Max, Maya and Photoshop have also been prolific for a long time.

Of course keeping up to date with the latest versions of software is important so it's always appropriate to seek out training to keep your skills and knowledge sharp.

Without the need for a step-change in reskilling, what's the best way to keep your skills relevant? We find it's not so much about the core skills but the context of deployment that has taken precedence. For example there is a high demand for engine specific experience across disciplines, in particular Unreal Engine 4 and Unity because the integration of art assets and gameplay features is so heavily reliant on the power and functionality of the engine.

> **The sheer power of new technol has lifted the lid on making games bigger and better**

So what are the challenges for studios looking for talent? Put simply, the sheer power of the new tech has lifted the lid on making games bigger and better. While the code-base stays broadly the same, what has changed significantly is the size and scale of pipelines alongside an increase in storage capability. This has paved the way for the likes of Microsoft's Xbox One X, revealed at E3, claiming to be the world's most powerful console with true 4K graphics and 40% more power than any rival. Where once the ambition of the studio might have hit a ceiling, with the right budget devs now have the option to deploy resource upon resource to reach new heights in creating immersive experiences – the sky's the limit.

A bigger challenge for the larger devs now is where to draw the line on features and detail to constrain the team sizes and keep the balance of production versus release-cycle in check.

The effect for studios acquiring talent is a continued squeeze on the experienced market with those who can hit the ground running in higher demand than ever across all the required disciplines.

High achieving grads with up to date skills are always welcomed into the industry, but studios increasingly need to attract established games professionals to be able to fully utilise their tech and apply their expertise of the dev lifecycle.

New tech is both exciting and powerful for developers and although it doesn't demand a reinvention of skills, the gap between supply and demand looks set to widen at least in the short term. This is a familiar cycle for developers and recruiters and a lag between innovation and an upskilled workforce is perhaps inevitable. The games industry has always overcome these skills gaps over time and, for us, it's all part of the enjoyment of recruiting for this inspiring, cutting-edge market. ■

Liz Prince, business manager at recruitment specialist Amiqus, helps solve some of the trickier problems job seekers currently face in the games industry

amiqus Visit **amiqus.com** for a fresh perspective on games recruitment

UNREAL'S BEST OF BRITISH

James Brooksby – Edge Case Games

What are you working on at the moment?
We're working hard on *Fractured Space*, an online PvP giant space ship battle game.

What excites you the most about the British development scene at the moment?
The development scene in Britain has never had it so good. Pretty much anyone who wants to make games has the tools they need to get cracking with very few barriers to entry.

What's it like working with Unreal Engine?
When Unreal changed its business model and showed an engine that just screamed quality and development speed, it was a perfect combination that meant we jumped on board.

What makes you confident about the next three years?
We have the tools, we have the platforms and the audiences and more people are growing up loving video games.

Pete Bottomley – White Paper Games

What are you working on at the moment?
We're currently working on *The Occupation*, a first-person, narrative-driven game set in 1980s North-West England in which you play as a whistleblowing journalist.

What excites you the most about the British development scene at the moment?
I think more than anything it's the rise of the smaller studios creating incredible games. We also host an Unreal Engine meet up in Manchester.

What's it like working with Unreal Engine?
We're putting a big emphasis on Sequencer, Unreal's new cinematic tool, to create a distinctive visual style. We're also creating complex AI entirely in Blueprints, Unreal's visual scripting system.

What makes you confident about the next three years?
I think the industry is getting to a place where, if you're aiming to create a high quality independent game, a small team can survive while keeping creative control of their work.

Darren Mills – Sumo Digital

What are you working on at the moment?
Alongside *Crackdown 3* and *Dead Island 2*, our first original self-published IP, *Snake Pass*, has been hugely successful.

What's it like working with Unreal Engine?
Unreal Engine 4 is great to work with due to its flexibility and scalability. The team can have an idea, jump into the engine, flesh it out in Blueprints and then see their ideas up and running in a matter of hours.

What makes you confident about the next three years?
I think there are so many things going for the industry right now. The Switch is doing well and Microsoft and Sony are both showing confidence by releasing mid-generation system refreshes, which is empowering devs.

Paul Jackson - Dovetail Games

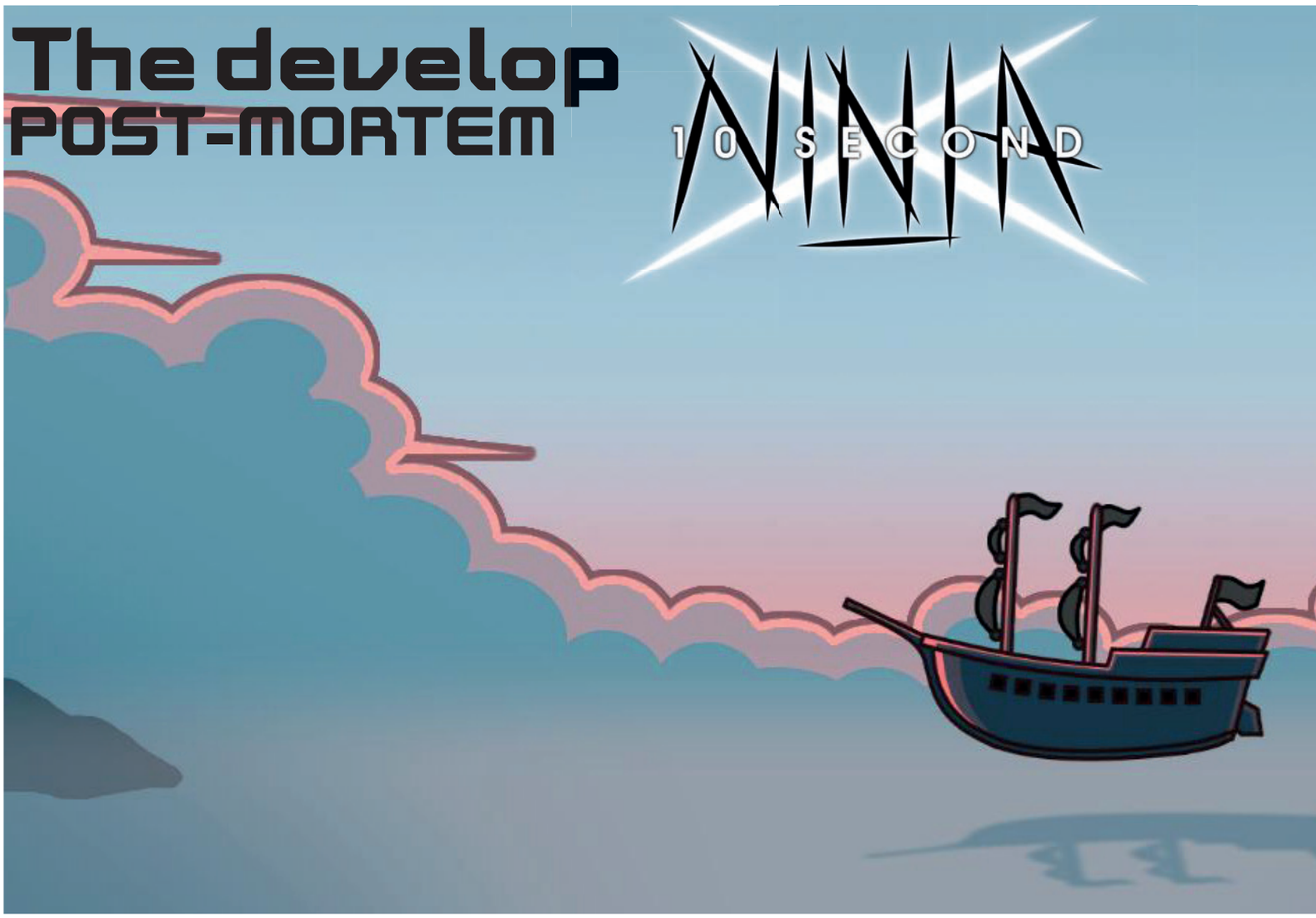
What are you working on at the moment?
We are focused on getting *Flight Sim World* into a great place.

What excites you the most about the British development scene at the moment?
Small developers are starting to turn into larger publisher/developers, and seem to be getting the support and sales to do that.

What's it like working with Unreal Engine?
We had to be confident that the engine we would use would be robust and keep developing to keep up. So far so good.

What makes you confident about the next three years?
I'm confident because we are building a unique environment where our teams can thrive.

The develop POST-MORTEM



Dan Pearce of Four Circle Interactive talks to **Sean Cleaver** about career beginnings, dropping out of university, games that troll you and the history of 10 Second Ninja and its sequel, 10 Second Ninja X

One of the great things about the games industry is that it is replete with success stories from humble beginnings. *10 Second Ninja* is one of those stories. If you've never played it or its sequel, as a ninja you have 10 seconds to complete incrementally challenging platform puzzle levels. Armed only with a sword and a limited number of shurikens, you must navigate the deadly environments in the quickest time possible to earn a star rating.

"I started *10 Second Ninja* when I was in sixth form," explains the games' creator, Dan Pearce. "It was about two years after winning at BAFTA's Young Games Designers awards in 2010. I'd done quite a few tours of studios and through that I was able to do work experience. I pretty quickly decided that there was a lot I liked about that triple-A style of development, but there was a lot that irked me." The early part of the decade was a tulmultuous one with many studios closing. "Junior members are the easiest to get rid of. It seemed like that big budget side of games was about to enter quite a lot of turbulence, which ended up being the case."

As studios closed, solo development became the go-to move for veterans. But it was also equally important for younger game developers to get experience, as Pearce remembers. "*Indie Game: The Movie* had just come out, so I was very inspired by that. In hindsight I'm not sure how much that was good for me. There was a big Indie renaissance going on and I said to myself, 'Okay, here's my 'in'. I've got a few years before I really need to be looking for a job in games. If I make something polished and commercial, that's going to showcase my skillset a lot better than a bunch of prototypes or design work."

NINJA TRAINING

The road to developing a prototype started very early on, while Pearce was still in education. "I showed it to a few of my friends. They got really competitive with it, so I knew there was something in it. I developed that over two or three years through university, which I dropped out of after a year. I gradually polished it up more and more."

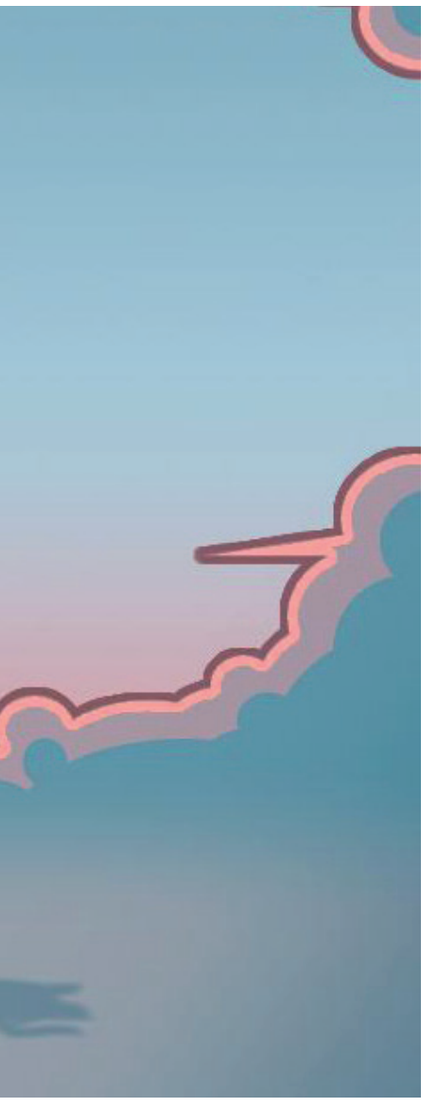
"I restarted that game three times with different art styles. It was a long process. You tend to hear developers say stuff like, 'Oh yeah, usually you'll fail ten projects before you get the one that works.' *10 Second Ninja* was all of those at once. I knew people liked the core concept, so I kept going back to it. for a few years. I took it to Game City and other shows and I got better at talking about the game."

"By the time I got to the end of my first year at university I knew I was going to release *10 Second Ninja* in a matter of months. I hated university. I dropped out and made a deal with my parents to support me for a short time."

TEACH ME, SENSEI

"I was born in '94," explains Pearce. "So by the time I was starting to really get into games, 3D was the standard and every game was trying to be 3D in some way. Obviously there were 2D games I played when I was growing up, but there weren't a lot of them. It wasn't the norm. So that style of game design was a little bit alien to me.

"Having this indie renaissance with Newgrounds and Xbox Live Arcade



was like discovering a new genre. It was a really refreshing experience, playing *Super Meat Boy* and *Castle Crashers*. Realising games could be designed in that way and how much more accessible that style of game development is, was really huge for me. *10 Second Ninja* was definitely a reflection of that."

Time limits are still in modern day games, but the in-game importance of the mechanic hasn't been as prominent in the last decade. "*Super Mario Bros*. had a timer and also had lives," says Pearce. "Those were two staples of that game that didn't really benefit the experience at all, but that every game copied for about twenty years afterwards. I kept looking at these games and realising the way I am playing when I'm aware of the time constraint is much more interesting. I'm thinking about the space much more critically and I'm having a much more rewarding time."

"It almost started off as sort of a joke. There are a lot of super hard trolling games. Why don't I try that and see how it feels? It turns out that it wasn't really trolling at all. It was actually really fun. Early prototypes sucked, but that core loop was really engaging."

NINJA SOULS

It's no secret that difficulty in games this decade has a benchmark and it is called *Dark Souls*. Any game that now presents a suitably high difficulty level seems to get labelled with the 'Souls-Like' tag. "People get stroppy about bringing up *Dark Souls*, but I think it's valid," says Pearce. "In *Dark Souls*, it's very difficult, but it's not so much about dexterity as it's about forethought and rethinking critically about the mechanics that you're using when you're dodging and when you're moving. It's a very smart game and it expects the player to be smart, much more than it expects the player to be responsive with the controller.

"While *10 Second Ninja* is obviously a much faster game, we do give the player a big window of time at the very start of the level where they can just look at it and go, 'Okay, what's my route? What do I have going for me? Is it quicker to use one of my three shurikens to hit that guy over there? Or is it quicker if I run up there and shuriken the guy on the other side of the level?'

"Everyone that plays is thinking about space critically. That's what 90 per cent of games are. I have these abilities that interact with the space in these different ways. How do I solve this problem? It's a super abstract way of looking at it. It's easy to look at games as being too abstract in that way and lose the fantasy of it for a bit.

"On a mechanical level, it's about thinking about space. But we also try to make sure it is also about dexterity and responsiveness and make sure that both of those elements are tied together by a core fantasy that is appealing. The fantasy of being a ninja for me is about being very quiet and still, looking at your environment, and then suddenly super fast, just zipping around, doing all this cool stuff. I feel like that's a fantasy that's very potent. I feel like, on a mechanical level, it made sense to combine those two things."

> **People get stroppy about bringing up Dark Souls, but I think it's valid**
>
> *Dan Pearce*
>
> *Four Circle Interactive*

REFLECTIONS

One of the poetic ironies about *10 Second Ninja* and sequel *10 Second Ninja X* is that what began as a way to showcase what Pearce could do is now used as showcase for what his studio Four Circle Interactive, can do.

Things have changed though for Pearce and his career outlook.

"A fundamental problem, and this applies to *10 Second Ninja* and *10 Second Ninja X*, is that they were both really good games for two years before they came out. If they had come out in 2012 and 2014, I think they would have killed.

"I felt like, up until this point, we've been lagging a bit behind where industry trends are going. It looks like indie games are heading towards a mid-tier now. It's not just two people in their bedrooms making games. It's small teams. It's moderate budget, like half a million combined marketing and development costs.

"It seems a bit like we've leapfrogged over about two years in what our company should have been doing, which is scary. To an extent, the bigger these products get, the more I slip into a producer role.

"If worst came to worst, and everything just went completely down for some reason, I feel like I could apply for a senior role in a different company, or a mid-role at a bigger company, and I would have the experience to follow through on that.

"That's cool for me. I feel secure in what I'm doing and my skill set, which is nice, because the original goal with all of this was I just wanted to make sure I could get a good junior position. Now I wouldn't be happy with that, and I don't think people would be getting the best out of me if I were in that situation. Hopefully that continues and I keep making a ladder for myself." ■

GAME FOR A **LAUGH**

Indie dev Byron Atkinson-Jones may have made a mistake. One errant thought now leads him on a year-long journey towards his first charity stand-up performance. If only for the lols.

I am doing something incredibly stupid. My friends and colleagues all claim it's a brave thing to do but that's just code for "yeah, you're stupid, but we'll have fun watching this spin out – pass the popcorn".

I'm nobody special, just another indie developer making their way through the world, making games. If you need more insight into who I am then just look me up on twitter (@xiotex). In summary: I've been a game developer since the 90s, where my first claim to fame is the development of the Target Manager app every Playstation developer used to make their games. Sorry, try not to hold it against me!

What is all this about and what have I done that's so stupid?

Every year the Comedy Store runs a charity event called Stand up for GamesAid, hosted by Imran Yusuf. Imran started his career in the games industry as a QA tester and then moved into stand-up comedy. For some reason. Maybe it pays better? The event is great, you can watch excellent stand-up comedians for one night and all the proceeds go to the games industry charity GamesAid, which is all about raising funds for charities who help disadvantaged and disabled children and young people. It's a great event for a great cause.

I don't drink. Alcohol, I mean, not stuff like water. Because that would be daft and extremely life limiting. This all started one day after a good business meeting. We ended the night by going to the Comedy Store to watch Stand up for GamesAid. I was at the bar getting drinks and instead of my usual water for some reason I decided to get a cider. I took a few sips. The rest is a bit of a blur, but one idea took this opportunity to burrow itself deep into the darkest regions of my mind. It anchored there shouting "**YOU SHOULD DO A STAND-UP ROUTINE FOR CHARITY!**"

That voice was still shouting in my head the next day, which wan't great, because I had a hell of a hangover. The worst bit? I'd only had a few sips!

As I sat down to work on my latest game *Promethium* the voice refused to go away and, in a semi-dream state, before I knew it, I had sent out emails to the relevant people telling them the idea. The next thing I know I've got a meeting with Imran to pitch to him.

I've mentioned I'm an indie developer, right? I can code, I can design, I can do some art and I'm getting there with music and SFX, but I'm spectacularly bad at pitching. I've tried to pitch games to people for games funding and to publishers but I always fail terribly. In fact, I've only ever had one game published and that's because the publisher approached *me*. So I wasn't hopeful about my idea getting past stage one with Imran.

> **Just as I'm drifting off to sleep the sudden realisation that I'm doing this hits me. How could I have been so stupid? I blame the cider**

Our meeting was at BAFTA and to ease my tension I thought it would be a great idea if we discussed the idea over food. The menus arrived at the table and looking through it Imran said "I've recently become a vegetarian; I hope there's something here I can eat".

"I could never be a vegetarian. How do you cope without bacon?" I said.

"Never been a problem, I'm a Muslim." Great, I'd just failed pitching 101: research who you are pitching to. After some wrangling where I attempted to take my foot out of my mouth, the evening went far better than I expected and Imran was all for the idea. Before I know it, we're drawing up plans of what to do next. One thing is for certain, at the next Stand Up for GamesAid night at the Comedy Store I will be there on the stage for 5 minutes trying not to die.

At bed time, just as I'm drifting off to sleep the sudden realisation that I'm doing this hits me and I spend the rest of the night staring at the ceiling. How could I have been so stupid?

I blame the cider.

Did I mention this was for charity? No? that was a bit daft of me, here's the link, give generously, as it's for a great cause:

https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/Byron-Atkinson-Jones ■

We want to make the best games possible, and we believe that making them should be fun.

At Playground we set ourselves lofty goals. We want to be the best in the world at whatever we do, so we never compromise on quality. But we also believe that making games should be fun, and we do everything we can to create an environment which fosters creativity, teamwork and a relaxed working atmosphere.

Playground Perks:

The basics

- Competitive salaries
- Contributory pension scheme
- Private healthcare
- Childcare vouchers

More Perks

- Complimentary breakfast
- Complimentary hot and cold drinks
- Complimentary fruit
- Afternoon cakes
- Subsidised snacks
- Discounted gym membership
- Extensive video games library
- Pinball machine
- Retro arcade machine
- Pool & Ping-Pong tables

What makes us stand out?

- Royalties scheme
- 25 days holiday, plus Bank Holidays
- 2 duvet days
- Flexible working hours with core hours between 10am and 4pm

Playground Socials

- Subsidised `Pub Thursdays'
- Summer BBQ
- Christmas Party
- Epic Wrap Parties

www.playground-games.com/careers

Playground Games™

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